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# HOURS WITH THE PLAYERS

By DUTTON COOK

AUTHOR OF

"A BOOK OF THE PLAY," "ART IN ENGLAND," "PAUL FOSTER'S DAUGHTER,"  
"LEO," "HOBSON'S CHOICE," ETC., ETC.



*IN TWO VOLUMES*



**London**

CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1881

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## P R E F A C E.

THE blower of his own trumpet is usually rather a suspected sort of soloist, a disparaged musician. Yet some measure of self-assertion is often necessary : traders must advertise their wares, and it behoves authors now and then to bespeak a favourable estimate of their efforts. Soliciting approval of this book, therefore, I presume to claim on its behalf that it contains more precise and complete memoirs of sundry of the performers it deals with than have previously been submitted to the public, or could be forthcoming without considerable diligence, search, and study. I permit myself this assertion with the less reluctance, because my labour in the matter has been of the kind which physics pain ; has been, indeed, as Macduff says, "a joyful trouble." For the transactions of the stage and the adventures of its professors have always been to me curiously interesting and entertaining. Histrionic art at its best I hold to be intellectually valuable and delightful.

1882



It may be that a book of this character, an assemblage of biographies, can hardly pretend to much distinctness of plan. And yet I hope to show that I have not worked wholly without method.

Will the reader for a while combine with me in imagining that, having entered a Gallery of Theatrical Portraits, we are tempted to pause now here, now there, to contemplate and to discourse upon certain of the pictures and the personages they represent? The collection is not complete, or we may be supposed to proceed somewhat capriciously: passing by, possibly, some more eminent and therefore more familiar examples, to regard the effigies of players less noted and yet possessed of genuine titles to consideration. Handsome WILL MOUNTFORD, with the narrative of his troubled end, first engages us; and then we pass to the animated canvas from which appeals to admiration and enthusiasm the beautiful MRS. WOFFINGTON. We dwell for a little while upon the seamy-sided romance of the life of the fair and frail MRS. MARY, otherwise PERDITA, ROBINSON; and next find ourselves confronted by the brilliant group of artists concerned in the first performance of the immortal "School for Scandal:" the original personators of the TEAZLES and the SURFACES, of SIR BENJAMIN BACKBITE and his uncle CRABTREE, of MRS. CANDOUR, and even of little MR. MOSES, the money-lender.

From these counterfeit presentments, after lingering a little over the fortunes of LADY SUSAN and her player-lover and husband, WILLIAM O'BRIEN, we invade the present century and approach performers of a comparatively modern date, beginning with "the gentleman of the name of BOOTH," as Hazlitt wrote of him,—including "OLD FARREN" and MRS. GLOVER, RACHEL FELIX and CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN, and some one or two more,—to close, rather sadly perhaps, with a slight sketch of the departed French-English most pleasant and accomplished actor, CHARLES FECHTER. Of living tragedians and comedians it has not been my cue to speak upon the present occasion.

Need I urge further in advocacy of these pages ? The reader will quickly discover for himself which of the persons portrayed and studied here pertain altogether to the past, and are only narrated of "at second hand," and which are players I have myself seen play, and concerning whom I can step into the box and tender legitimate evidence. Of course, I was in some cases rather a juvenile witness, and not by any means an expert ; yet, to pursue the figure, I knew the nature of an oath, and I trust my testimony as far as it goes may be accepted, therefore, as credible and trustworthy. For as to certain of the subjects of these biographies the witnesses are decreasing in number, recollections are dimming

rapidly, and Cibber's grandiloquent regrets gain new application: "Pity it is that the momentary beauties flowing from an harmonious elocution cannot, like those of poetry, be their own record: that the animated graces of the actor can live no longer than the instant breath and motion that present them; or, at least, can but faintly glimmer through the memory or imperfect attestation of a few surviving spectators."

One word more. I must beg indulgence in regard to the iteration both of facts and phrases that may be discovered in the course of the book. This defect was hardly evitable: because of the nature of the subject, the necessity of often traversing the same ground, and because of the conditions under which the papers here collected originally appeared.

DUTTON COOK.

69, Gloucester Crescent, Regent's Park,  
October, 1881.

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# HOURS WITH THE PLAYERS.

## CHAPTER I.

WILL MOUNTFORD AND LORD MOHUN.

WILLIAM MOUNTFORD, born about the year 1660, the son of Captain Mountford, a gentleman of good family in Staffordshire, and bred up to no particular employment, passed his earlier years in the country, but on his arriving at manhood, as a biographer informs us, "his gaiety of temper and easy disposition, which were very conspicuous, could not easily be restrained to the solitary amusements of a rural life." Of the date of his first appearance on the stage no record exists, but he is believed to have been the "Young Mumford" who played the part of "a boy" in the comedy of "The Counterfeits," represented at the theatre in Dorset Garden in 1678. To the change in the spelling of his name, no importance attaches ; in those days, and for some time afterwards,

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considerable licence prevailed in that respect. The great Mr. Betterton often appears in stage histories of his period as Mr. Batterton, or Bettertun, and Mr. Colley Cibber's name is occasionally printed *Cyber*, now and then merely *Colley*. In 1680 the part of *Jack, the Barber's Boy*, in "Revenge, or a Match in Newgate," a comedy ascribed to Mrs. Behn, was sustained by Mr. "Mumford." Downes, in his "Roscius Anglicanus" (1708), speaks of Mountford as having arrived in 1682, at "the maturity of a good actor." He was then a member of the company playing at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane, and appeared as *Alphonso Corso*, in "The Duke of Guise," by Dryden and Lee, a tragedy which occasioned some excitement at the time from a prevalent notion that a parallel was intended to be conveyed by the authors between the characters of the Duke of Monmouth and the Duke of Guise. The Whigs were very angry, at a presumed attack upon them, and Dryden published a letter vindicating the play from the charges brought against it.

For some period Mountford appears to have been entertained on the establishment of Lord Chancellor Jeffreys, whose favour he had secured by a skilful mimicry of the great lawyers of the age "in their tone of voice and in their action and gesture of body." He had pleaded, in 1685, a mock suit before the Chancellor, the Lord Mayor, and minor civic magnates, and had greatly delighted his audience. Mrs. Piozzi, comment-

ing upon this story of Mountford's doings, writes: "I dare say the humour of making *Portia*, in the 'Merchant of Venice,' mimic Lord Mansfield, came from this. I remember it always done." She was probably thinking of Mrs. Clive, who was especially famous for her amusing mockery of the leading barrister of her time in her performance of *Portia*.

About the year 1687, Mountford married a Mistress Percival, a comic actress of great talent and beauty, who had first appeared at the Theatre Royal in 1681. She was in later years known as Mrs. Verbruggen, and it was by way of celebration of her charms that Gay the poet wrote his admirable ballad of "Black-eyed Susan."

Of Mountford's appearance and manner of acting, Colley Cibber has left us a particular description. He was tall, well-made, fair, and of an agreeable aspect; gifted with a full, clear, and melodious voice. In tragedy he was accounted a most affectionate lover, and Cibber highly commends his performance of *Alexander the Great*, especially in the scene where the hero throws himself at the feet of *Statira*, and implores her to pardon his infidelities. "There we saw the great, the tender, the penitent, the despairing, the transported, and the amiable in the highest perfection." In comedy he was a distinguished Fine Gentleman, with a particular talent in giving life to *bon mots* and repartees. "The wit of the poet seemed always to come from him *ex*



*tempore*, and sharpened into more wit from his brilliant manner of delivering it." Cibber, too, has quite an actor's appreciation of the propriety of Mountford's demeanour upon the stage, and his consideration for his brother players. He ever bore in mind, we are informed, "what was due to the presence of equal or superior characters, though inferior actors; he filled the stage, not by elbowing and by crossing it before others or disconcerting their action, but by surpassing them in true and masterly touches of nature."

The characters supported by Mountford pertain almost altogether to an obsolete theatrical repertory. He flourished in days when the ranting tragedies of Nat Lée, the jingling plays of Dryden, the ribald comedies of Mrs. Behn, Etherege, and others, held firm possession of the stage. Melpomene was then an unnatural beldam who stalked on stilts and rhymed and ranted atrociously; Thalia was a hoyden and a slut, particularly loose-mannered and foul-mouthed. The players and playwrights after the Restoration took ample vengeance for the intolerance with which they had been treated by the Puritans. "It's our turn now!" seems to have been the cry. "You objected to Beaumont and Fletcher—how do you like Tom D'Urfey?" If all "the suppressed passages" in Mr. Bowdler's Shakespeare were to be printed consecutively, they would compose quite a modest work in comparison with

certain of the entertainments played before the Courts of Charles and James II., and even, though in a less degree, of William and Mary. King William's queen indeed withdrew her objection to Mrs. Behn's dissolute comedy of "The Rover, or the Banished Cavaliers," and permitted its performance at Whitehall, solely for the sake of Mountford's brilliant representation of the hero. In this part, according to Cibber, the player seemed "to wash off the guilt from vice and gave it charms and merit."

But few of Shakespeare's plays had found their way back to the stage. In Mountford's list of characters appears *Macduff*, played probably to the *Macbeth* of Betterton, in Sir William Davenant's operatic version of the tragedy; but there is no evidence of his having sustained any other Shakespearian part. His most important tragic characters seem to have been *Alexander* and *Castalio*, in Otway's tragedy of "The Orphan." Cibber highly lauds his *Sparkish* in Wycherley's "Country Wife," as an evidence of the variety of his genius. In this part he is said to have entirely changed himself, and at once thrown off the man of sense for the brisk, vain, rude, and lively coxcomb, the false, flashy pretender to wit, and the dupe of his own sufficiency. His excellence in *Sir Courtly Nice*, in Crowne's comedy of that name, is reputed to have been still greater. It was said of him that he was no longer

Mountford but another person; he was not himself in voice, mien, or gesture; the whole man was changed. He assumed an insipid civility, an elegant formal manner, a drawling delicacy of articulation, a stately flatness of address, an empty loftiness of attitude; and maintained these characteristics steadily through the part with admirable consistency and judgment. Cibber confesses that any success he may himself have attained in his subsequent performances of these characters was wholly due to his memory of Mountford's example. "Had he been remembered when I first attempted them," writes the modest Colley, "my defects would have been more easily discovered, and consequently my favourable reception in them must have been very much and justly abated." Certainly Mountford had personal qualifications with which Cibber could not pretend to compete. To a handsome face and noble form, Mountford added "a clear counter tenor and a melodious warbling throat,"—matters of some importance when it is borne in mind that in his last scene, *Sir Courtly* has to sing,—while Colley was a plain-featured gentleman with a somewhat insignificant figure, and, as he himself chronicles, "a screaming treble voice." In his youth he had been known by the nickname of "Hatchet-face," in allusion to his exceeding leanness.

In the year 1680 the great Mrs. Anne Bracegirdle first appeared upon the stage. According to one biographer

she was then but six years old. She played the part of the page on the production of Otway's "Orphan," at the Dorset Garden Theatre. Her name does not appear in the cast of characters, however; she is described simply as "the little girl." There is no evidence of any further performances of the young lady until 1688, when she sustained the character of *Lucia* in Shadwell's play "The Squire of Alsatia." In 1691 she was playing *Maria* to the *Mountacute* of Mountford, in a play called "Edward the Third," written by one Mr. Bancroft, but given by him to Mountford, and included in the collected edition of his plays published by Tonson in 1720. She also represented *Tamira* in "Bussy D'Ambois," a tragedy adapted from Chapman by D'Urfey; Mountford being the *D'Ambois*. The actress and the actor were also included in the cast of the tragedy of "Alphonso, King of Naples," and the comedies of "Love for Money," and the "Merry Devil of Edmonton." In 1692 they appeared in "The Marriage-Hater Matched," "Regulus," "The Wives' Excuse," "Cleomenes," and other plays; Mrs. Bracegirdle appearing also on some occasions as *Statira* to Mountford's highly applauded performance of *Alexander*.

Mrs. Bracegirdle seems to have been the first actress who succeeded in establishing anything like a reputation for private worth and propriety of conduct. In times when the actor was accounted in popular opinion but a mere vagabond, a very slender partition severing him

from his proper position in the stocks or at the whipping-post, it is not to be supposed that the fame of the actress was held in very high esteem. The theatrical sisterhood suffered under a foregone conclusion; their frailty was assumed as a matter quite of course—judgment was given against them before they could urge a word in their defence—before they could even present themselves in court. It must be said that many of them succumbed most uncomplainingly to this view of their case, and led lives which rather justified than refuted the adverse opinions of their judges. But Mrs. Bracegirdle's career, if not wholly unimpeachable, presented a certain approximation to virtuous living. Cibber, who wrote in the lady's lifetime, was her old friend and playfellow, and, it may be supposed, was unlikely to give her needless offence, says, somewhat reservedly, that she was "not unguarded in her private character." But he hastens to add that this discretion contributed not a little to make her the darling of the theatre,—for although she was a sort of universal passion, scarce an audience that saw her being less than half of them her lovers, without a suspected favourite among them, and although under the highest temptations, her constancy in resisting them served but to increase the number of her admirers. Anthony Aston, who wrote a continuation of Cibber, designates her "the Diana of the stage," and especially describes her works of charity: how she would go often to Clare Market and give money

to the poor unemployed basket-women there, "insomuch that she could not pass that neighbourhood without the thankful acclamation of people of all degrees ; so that if any person had affronted her they would have been in danger of being killed directly. And yet," he concludes, as though in surprise at the subject of his panegyric, "this good woman was an actress !" All honour to Anne Bracegirdle for these her good deeds !

Gildon, in his "Comparison between the Two Stages" (1702), does not scruple to cast doubts upon the good repute of Mrs. Bracegirdle, and that clever scoundrel Tom Brown, in his "Letters from the Dead to the Living," follows suit grossly enough. But that Mr. Tom Brown should not believe in virtue is no such very marvellous matter. Those scurrilous collections known as "Poems on State Affairs," supply allusions to the subject, and even suggest that the lady had become at least the *morganatic* wife of Mr. Congreve, the poet and dramatist, though it would be difficult now to prove that such an union ever took place. Lord Macaulay, in his History of England, makes mention of Mrs. Bracegirdle, but not, it must be admitted, in the most flattering terms. "It was said of her that in the crowded theatre she had as many lovers as she had male spectators. Yet, no lover, however rich, however high in rank, had prevailed on her to be mistress. Those who are acquainted with the parts which she was in the habit of playing, and with

the epilogues which it was her special business to recite, will not give her credit for any extraordinary measure of virtue or delicacy. She seems to have been a cold, vain, and interested coquette, who perfectly understood how much the influence of her charms was increased by the fame of a severity which cost her nothing, and who could venture to flirt with a succession of admirers in the just confidence that no flame which she might kindle in them would thaw her own ice." This is severe upon the actress, and surely a little prudish too. With regard to the characters she sustained and the epilogues she delivered, the authors who wrote and the audiences who encouraged and applauded them, are clearly more deserving of censure than Anne Bracegirdle.\* Can the noble historian have entertained the notion that the lady was in any way a Tory?

Notwithstanding her great popularity and the universal admiration she excited, it is tolerably clear that the lady was not absolutely a beauty. Cibber says expressly that she had no higher claims to be so considered "than

\* Doubtless the licence of the theatre was excessive about this time, and well merited the severe rebukes contained in Jeremy Collier's "View of the Stage" (1697). This work seems to have had an important effect upon the public mind, and brought about a real reform in the matter. It was probably due to Collier's writings that (in 1701) we find "an information brought in the King's Bench against twelve of the players, viz. Mrs. Bracegirdle, Mrs. Barry, Mr. Batterton, Mr. Vanbruggen, etc., for using indecent expressions in some late plays, particularly the 'Provoked Wife.'"

what the most desirable brunette might pretend to." Aston, however, registers in her favour a long list of graces. She was "of a lovely height," he says, "with dark brown hair and eyebrows, black sparkling eyes, and a fresh blushy complexion; and whenever she exerted herself had an involuntary flushing in her breast, neck, and face, having continually a cheerful aspect and a fine set of even white teeth: never making an exit but that she left the audience in an imitation of her pleasant countenance." Then she possessed a charming figure, which she was not indisposed to display in male attire—proud probably of her shapely legs and feet and her graceful gait. One little defect her biographer chronicles. Her right shoulder was in some way deformed, "pro-tended" a trifle; though this, when in man's dress, she effectually concealed beneath her flowing peruke. Her voice was very melodious, and in parts that required the introduction of a song, her singing and action "gave a pleasure which good sense in those days was not ashamed to give praise to." "She inspired" (to go on with Cibber's account) "the best authors to write for her, and two of them" (Rowe and Congreve) "when they gave her a lover in a play, seemed palpably to plead their own passions and make their private court to her in fictitious characters." Altogether we are not surprised to learn that it was "a fashion among the gay and young to have a taste or *tendre* for Mrs. Bracegirdle."



We now come to the tragic death of poor Will Mountford in the thirty-third year of his age.

Narcissus Luttrell, in his curious "Relation of State Affairs from 1678 to 1714," records, under date the 10th of December, 1692: "Last night Lord Mohun, Captain Hill, of Colonel Earle's regiment, and others pursued Mountford the actor from the playhouse to his lodgings, in Norfolk Street, where one kissed him while Hill run him through the belly; they ran away, but his lordship was this morning seized and committed to prison. Mountford died of his wounds this afternoon. The quarrel was about Mrs. Bracegirdle, the actress, whom they would have trepanned away. But Mountford prevented it, wherefore they murdered him."

This was by no means an accurate account of the manner in which Mountford met his death. But on the morrow of the occurrence the story was likely to reach Mr. Luttrell's ears in something of a confused form. Two things were clear, however: the poor player had been slain, and Lord Mohun and Captain Hill were charged as principals with his murder.

Captain Richard Hill appears to have been a dissipated young gentleman, who had to a most desperate extent fallen in with the fashion of adoring Mrs. Bracegirdle. What with love and liquor, he had so perturbed and confused such small brains as he ever possessed as to be capable of any extravagance, and on the whole

presented as small claim to be accounted a reasonable being as could well be conceived. Lord Mohun, who was left to bear the brunt of the whole evil business, demands a little more attention at our hands.

The Mohuns of Okehampton were an old family. From Collins's Peerage we learn that the first William de Mohun came over with the Conqueror, and that Dunster Castle, "with other fair lordships," was the reward of his fidelity. Charles, the fifth and last baron, was the son of the fourth lord, by Philippa, one of the daughters of Arthur Annesley, Earl of Anglesey, and Lord Privy Seal. His education was much neglected, owing probably to the circumstances of his having lost his father early in life, and his mother having married again, one Mr. Coward, Serjeant-at-Law. It should be borne in mind, too, that at the time of the death of Mountford, Lord Mohun, according to Evelyn, was only in his eighteenth year.

He had sufficiently distinguished himself, however, as a wild and quarrelsome sort of patrician. On the 1st of December, 1692, Mr. Luttrell chronicles: "The Lords Mohun and Kennedy having challenged each other, his Majesty on notice thereof, confined them to their lodgings, which they have since quitted in order to fight." On the 8th, he writes: "The Lords Mohun and Kennedy fought a duel yesterday—both wounded." The wound must have been slight enough in the case of Lord

Mohun, for on the 9th he was involved in the occurrences which led to the death of Mountford, and on his trial for the murder no mention whatever was made of his having been previously wounded.

But it must be said for Lord Mohun that he lived in an age of quarrels, brawls, and duels. Upon very light provocation, gentlemen were then in the habit of crossing weapons instantly on their disagreement: in the street, in private rooms, at taverns, under the Piazza, Covent Garden, with sometimes more formal meetings in Leicester Fields, or the open ground behind Montague House, when the duellists with their seconds were conveyed in sedan-chairs to the scene of combat. And the players were little less disposed to be quarrelsome and to refer their disputes to the arbitrament of the sword, than their patrons the noblemen and gentlemen. Aston says, in reference to Verbruggen, the actor, who had become the husband of the widowed Mrs. Mountford, "that his sword was drawn upon the least occasion, a fashion which greatly prevailed during King William's reign." About a month after the death of Mountford, Narcissus Luttrell enters in his diary: "A duel was yesterday fought between one Mr. Chamberlayne and Mr. Killegrew, of the playhouse." In 1697 young Mr. Hildebrand Horden, a handsome and promising actor at Drury Lane, met his death in a frivolous quarrel at the Rose Tavern. Quin, Garrick, and even

John Kemble, it may be noted, found it necessary at some one time in their lives to "go out" and give or receive "satisfaction."

The particulars of the death of poor Will Mountford will appear when we come to consider the trial of Lord Mohun by the House of Lords assembled in Westminster Hall. His lordship had surrendered to or been arrested by the watch on the night of the murder. His friend Captain Hill had made good his escape. Under date Tuesday, the 13th of December, 1692, the invaluable Luttrell writes: "On Saturday last the Lord Mohun, committed for the murder of Mr. Mountford, was bailed by some justices at Hicks' Hall. His bail were, the Lord Brandon and Mr. Charles Montague, in £2000. The coroner's inquest have brought it in murder, both in his lordship and Captain Hill, which last is fled; his mother went to the king to intercede for her son, but was told 'twas a barbarous act, and that he would leave it to the law." Lord Macaulay understands the mother of Lord Mohun to be here referred to.

On the night of the 13th of December, the body of Mountford was interred in the burying-ground of St. Clement Danes, where the remains of the dramatists Otway and Lee, and of Lowen, one of the original actors of Shakespeare's plays, also rest. As a proof of the excitement occasioned by the sad event, and the extent of the public feeling at the loss of so esteemed an actor,

it may be noted that no less than a thousand persons were present at the funeral, the king's organist and the choristers from Whitehall attending the ceremony and performing an appropriate anthem.

Meanwhile, Captain Hill could not be heard of. Luttrell chronicles rumours of his capture, now in the Isle of Wight, now in Scotland ; but these would appear to have been wholly without foundation. And meanwhile, a committee of the House of Lords are discussing the most fitting manner of bringing Lord Mohun to justice, and reporting that they find but one precedent of a peer tried at the bar of the house for murder. Finally it is decided that he shall be brought before a High Steward in Westminster Hall. Luttrell records : "*28th January, 1692.*—This day the Lords were taken up in adjusting the preliminaries for the Lord Mohun's trial on Tuesday next, and have appointed eight tickets to each lord to dispose among their friends. *31st January.*—This morning the Lieutenant of the Tower carried his prisoner, the Lord Mohun, to Westminster Hall, where the king and many of the nobility and gentry were present. . . . The prisoner was brought into court with the porter of the Tower carrying the axe before the prisoner, with the edge turned from him. . . . About three, the High Steward summoned up the witnesses. Then the king withdrew, and went to Kensington. It is believed he will be acquitted."



There were eighty-three peers present at the trial of Lord Mohun in Westminster Hall: the Marquis of Carmarthen being the Lord High Steward of the Court. Several noble lords, who neglected to attend on the occasion, were afterwards subjected to a fine of £100 each. The Attorney-General, Sir John Somers, the Solicitor-General, Sir Thomas Trevor, and Mr. Serjeant Thompson, appeared as counsel for the Crown. For the prisoner, had been retained Sir Thomas Powis and Messrs. Hawles and Price; the services of these gentlemen, however, being limited to arguments upon such points of law as might arise during the progress of the case.

The trial lasted five days. Various witnesses were called to prove that some days previous to the death of Mountford, Captain Hill, Lord Mohun being present, had threatened the life of the actor. Hill at supper at the Rose Tavern in Covent Garden, had been heard to say, "I should not doubt the success of my amour with Mrs. Bracegirdle, if I were not obstructed by Mountford, whom I design to be the death of." To another witness, on a different occasion, Hill had whispered, "I am resolved to have the blood of Mountford;" but though Lord Mohun was close at hand, as he was talking at the time to another person, it seemed probable that he had not heard this threat. Hill had sent letters to Mrs. Bracegirdle, and had often asserted that he would marry

her with all his heart ; that he was satisfied she hated him and loved somebody else ; but that " he had thought of a way to be even with that body." At a dinner at the "Three Tuns, Shandois Street," Lord Mohun had remarked to one witness, " This design will cost Hill fifty guineas." Hill had then said, " If the villain offers to resist, I'll stab him." Upon which Lord Mohun added, " I will stand by my friend."

Undoubtedly, in the first instance, however it may have been afterwards extended, Hill's design was limited to the abduction of Mrs. Bracegirdle. " She was to be kept out of town for a week, to see if she could be persuaded to marry him," as one of the witnesses explained. The threats against Mountford could then only have had reference to any chance interference of his with that scheme. Hill and Mohun had bargained with one William Dixon, a coachman, for the hire of a coach and six. He was to drive to Totteridge, on this side Barnet. Two horses were to serve to the playhouse, while the other four were to stand in readiness " at the pound's end." There were six or seven pistols in the coach, and a change of clothes for the lady. Dixon was duly at the place appointed, " over against the Horse-shoe Tavern in Drury Lane." Mr. Hill then bade him drive lower down. He drove to my Lord Craven's door. Some soldiers there would have had him go in and drink, but he declined. He then carried Lord

Mohun and Hill to Norfolk Street, "below the watch-house;" stayed there while they went to the "White Horse Tavern," and then drove back to Lord Craven's door. Afterwards, it being ten o'clock, he went home, sending a postilion to take care of the coach.

At the theatre, it was remarked that Lord Mohun was wearing Hill's coat, and Hill Mohun's. They had changed coats two or three times in the course of the evening. (Hill's coat was probably part of his uniform as an officer in Colonel Earle's regiment, and therefore easily recognized.) The reason of this change of coats is not very apparent. It may have been due merely to idle frolic, or was planned to confuse witnesses, in case any trouble should come of the abduction of Mrs. Bracegirdle. The two gentlemen were probably not very sober on their arrival at the theatre. The money-taker deposed that they had refused to pay the extra charge for passing from the pit to the stage; and Lord Mohun had threatened to slit the noses of the managers if they ventured to importune his friend or himself on the subject.

Mrs. Bracegirdle was then sworn. Be sure there was some "sensation in court," when the popular actress came forward to give her evidence. She lived in Howard Street, which was at right angles to, and joined Norfolk and Surrey Streets, Strand. On the night of the 9th December, she, with her mother and brother, had been



supping with Mr. and Mrs. Page, in Princes Street, Drury Lane. At ten o'clock Mr. Page set forth to accompany them home. Coming down Drury Lane, a coach stood by Lord Craven's door. "The boot of the coach was down, and a great many men stood by it." Two soldiers pulled witness from Mr. Page, while four or five more came up, and nearly knocked down old Mrs. Bracegirdle, who hung about her daughter's neck so that they could not get her into the coach. Mr. Page called for help. Hill with his drawn sword then struck at Mr. Page, who warded the blows with his cane. When he could not get her into the coach, because of company coming up, Hill said he would see the lady home, and accordingly led her by one hand, and her mother by the other, all the way to Howard Street where she lodged. When pulled towards the coach, witness distinctly saw Lord Mohun in the coach. Arrived at home in Howard Street, Mr. Page was taken into the house, and Hill walked up and down the street with his sword drawn. As he led witness he said he would be revenged. Lord Mohun and Hill were both walking up and down. Was told by Mrs. Browne (who lived in the same house) that they had said they stayed to be revenged upon Mr. Mountford. Then, concludes Mrs. Bracegirdle, "I sent my brother, and the maid, and all the people we could, out of the house, to Mrs. Mountford, to see if she knew where her husband was,

to tell him of it ; and when they came in a-doors again, I went to the door ; and the doors were shut, and I listened to hear if they were there still ; and my Lord Mohun and Mr. Hill were walking up and down the street ; and by-and-by the watch came up to them, and when the watch came up to them they said, ‘Gentlemen, why do you walk with your swords drawn ?’ Says my Lord Mohun, ‘I’m a peer of England ; touch me if you dare !’ . . . Then the watch left them, and they went away ; and a little after, there was a cry of ‘murder !’ and that’s all I know, my lord.”

Mr. Gawen Page confirmed Mrs. Bracegirdle’s evidence, so far as it concerned him. Hill and Mohun waited outside the house for about an hour and a half. Upon a cry of “murder,” witness went into the street, found Mohun surrendering himself to the constable ; went to Mountford’s house, found him “lying all along in his blood upon the floor.” He asked to be lifted up, and said, in answer to witness’s question, that he had been barbarously run through before he could draw his sword.

Mrs. Page, the wife of the last witness, said that Mrs. Bracegirdle had supped at their lodgings, and Mr. Page had gone out to see her home. Alarmed at his long absence, witness sent out a servant to see after him, who brought back word that Mr. Page “had like to have been murdered, and Mrs. Bracegirdle carried away.”

Witness then went to Mrs. Bracegirdle's lodgings ; was desired to go over to Mrs. Mountford's, in Norfolk Street, and tell her to send to her husband to stay where he was, or to come home with a good guard. While speaking to Mrs. Mountford, heard "murder" called in the street ; opened the door, and Mountford came in, and fell with his arms round about witness's neck to support himself. He said Hill had murdered him. Witness "helped him to the parlour door ; there down he fell."

By the examination of the watch, it appeared that they were divided into two parties, or squads. One, under the charge of William Merry, beadle of the parish, went down Surrey Street ; the other, headed by Davenport, a constable, passed into Strand Lane. Merry gave evidence, that as he was going his rounds, and turning out of Howard Street into Surrey Street, he saw Captain Hill and Lord Mohun walking ; asked, "Who comes there?" Lord Mohun answered, "A friend." Witness asked, "What is the meaning of your swords being drawn? Return your swords and stand off." Lord Mohun returned his sword, and said, "I am a peer of the realm. Here, will you have my sword?" Did not take his sword, but said, "God bless your honour ! My lord, I know not what you are ; but I hope you are doing no harm." Two women stood at a door, with a candle, hard by. Witness asked them if they knew the

meaning of the business? They said one of the gentlemen had a sweetheart there. Lord Mohun said he was drinking a lady's health; and as soon as his bottle was out would be gone. He put up his own sword, and said Captain Hill could not do so, for he had lost his scabbard in Drury Lane. The watch seem then to have gone to the White Horse Tavern, in the neighbourhood, to make further inquiries, when, almost immediately, they heard a cry of "murder." When they returned, Captain Hill had escaped up Surrey Street. Lord Mohun surrendered himself. James Bassit, one of the watch, took him by the sleeve to lead him away. "I took him by the sleeve," said the witness; "he shook, and quaked, and trembled, as if he would tear it to pieces. He was carried to the Round-house, and kept there all night. He said he was glad Hill was not taken, but was sorry he had not more money about him; adding, 'I wish he had some of mine; and I don't care a farthing if I am hanged for him.'" The watch produced Hill's sword, which he had apparently thrown down as he made off, and Mountford's, the latter broken. Davenport, the constable, swore he picked up one piece, and a servant-maid took up another. There was a report among the people who were by that Mountford had made a pass, and at the first pass his sword was broken; so he, the constable, went with a lanthorn and found a piece of the sword.

Mrs. Browne's evidence was important, because it went to show that, after the carrying into effect of the extraordinary arrangement for the escorting home of Mrs. Bracegirdle, by the very men who had just previously attempted her abduction, Hill had renewed his threats in regard to Mountford. "I shall light on this Mountford," he said. Mrs. Browne asked, "Why, what hurt hath he done you?" Hill replied, "I have been abused, and will be avenged." He had already said much the same thing to Mrs. Bracegirdle, and from the sending over to Mrs. Mountford, it is quite clear that an alarm prevailed that Mountford was in peril by reason of Hill's threats.

What took place at the meeting of Mohun and Hill with Mountford, was described with some variety by the witnesses. After Mountford had come down Norfolk Street, he was not proceeding in the direction of his own house; he turned to the right into Howard Street, whereas he should have kept straight on. Either his attention was attracted by the presence of Mohun and Hill, and so he came out of his way; or, as the scandal-mongers preferred to believe, he was going to Mrs. Bracegirdle's. And this might have been so without any great scandal either. The hour was certainly late; but having heard of the attack upon her, he might be naturally anxious to satisfy himself of the lady's safety. According to his own showing, however, he was there,

but by chance. He was alone, and it is not clear that he had received warning of danger from the messengers sent out in search of him by his wife and others. Mrs. Browne, from Mrs. Bracegirdle's house, ran out to him. "But," said she, "though I would fain have spoken to him, he would not stay to hear me speak." It is evident, however, from what follows, that Mountford was acquainted with Hill's attempted abduction of Mrs. Bracegirdle. On meeting Mohun, "Your humble servant, my lord," said Mountford. "Your servant, Mr. Mountford," said Mohun; and they embraced after the fashion of the time. Then Mohun said, "I have a great respect for you, Mr. Mountford, and would have no difference between us; but there is a thing fallen out between Mrs. Bracegirdle and Mr. Hill." Mountford interposed. "My lord, has my wife disobeyed your lordship? If she has, she shall ask your pardon. But as for Mrs. Bracegirdle, she is no concern of mine. I know nothing of this matter. *I come here by accident*, and I hope your lordship will not vindicate such an ill man as Mr. Hill in such a matter as this." Lord Mohun said, "I suppose you were sent for?" Mountford replied that he came there by chance. According to one of the witnesses for the prosecution, one Mrs. Brewer, who lived next door to the Bracegirdles, Hill then came up and said, "Pray, my lord, hold your tongue; this is not a convenient time to discuss this

business," *and would have drawn Mohun away*,\* but upon Mountford saying, "I am sorry to see your lordship assisting Mr. Captain Hill in so ill an action as this," Hill struck him on the ear. Mountford cried out, "Damme, what's that for?" upon which Hill bade him draw. Mountford said, "That I will," and drew his sword. "But whether," said the witness Browne, "he received his wound before he drew his sword, or after, I cannot tell." Several witnesses for the defence, among them Captain Hill's footboy, Thomas Leake, and Mrs. Bracegirdle's servant, Elizabeth Walker, swore that the combatants made two or three passes at each other before Mountford cried out that he was killed, and threw away his sword; that they fought in the middle of the street, where there was a channel for the water to run; and that Lord Mohun stood apart on "the causey"—the paved stones at the side—with his sword sheathed. One witness, seeing them fighting, says he ran into the house to fetch "a paring-shovel," with an intention to part them; but before he could get back, they had run different ways. On the other hand, Mr. Bancroft, "the chyrurgeon," who attended Mountford on his death-bed, gave evidence: "I said to Mr. Mountford, 'I suppose I shall be asked some questions

\* This seems rather opposed to the theory of the prosecution, that Hill had been waiting on purpose to do violence to Mountford; or are we to understand that Hill was opposed to discussion of any kind, and was drawing Mohun away the more conveniently to fall upon Mountford?

about what you have said to me ; you are now upon the brink of eternity, and pray answer me truly. Who gave you this wound ? Was it Mr. Hill or my Lord Mohun ?' Said he, ' My Lord Mohun offered me no violence ; but while I was talking with my Lord Mohun, Hill struck me with his left hand, and with his right ran me through before I could put my hand to my sword.' " Hunt, another medical man, gave similar testimony : " I asked him the manner of his being hurt. He said, ' My Lord Mohun spoke to me, but Hill run me through before my sword was drawn. Hill was in me and through me before my sword was out.' And this," adds the witness, " he repeated about twelve o'clock, about half an hour before he died, the next day."

To reconcile the discrepancies in the evidence, we must understand that even after receiving his mortal wound, Mountford had strength sufficient to draw his sword and interchange passes with his adversary. This is certainly possible. Then throwing away his sword, which had been broken in the encounter, he cried, " I am killed ! " and staggered towards his own house. It will be noticed that Mountford's dying words acquitted Lord Mohun of the actual murder. The question remained as to how far he was implicated in an intention to murder : whether his remaining so long in the street with Hill was with the view of waiting for Mountford and assaulting him, or of abetting an assault upon him by Hill, in which case he



would share Hill's guilt; it being the law, that if two or more come together to do an unlawful act against the king's peace, of which the probable consequence might be murder, and one of them kills a man, then all are guilty of murder.

The case for the prosecution closed with the evidence of the two surgeons. The defendant had not, of course, the modern advantage of a speech from counsel on his behalf, but he proceeded to call witnesses to show in the first instance that he had been without any previous animosity against Mountford. One Mr. Brereton stated that he had been at the theatre, and had supped with Lord Mohun a few nights before the death of Mountford, when the play of "Alexander the Great" was acted. His lordship commended the play, and particularly Mr. Mountford's acting in it, spoke kindly of him, and pronounced him a good actor. The witness thought he acted well in comedy, but would never make so good a tragedian as Mr. Betterton and some others. Lord Mohun said that Mountford had been more civil to him than all the other players, and "he'd a mind to drink a bottle of wine with him, and would appoint a time for it." To explain the object of Hill and Mohun waiting in the street, Hill's footboy was called. He had overheard Hill say that he but waited to beg Mrs. Bracegirdle's pardon, and then he would begone, and that Hill and Mohun had said they would walk an hour under

Mrs. Bracegirdle's window, and an hour under that of Mrs. Barry (the famous tragic actress of the period), and then they would go home.

From the evidence of this witness, it appeared, strangely enough, that Mrs. Bracegirdle's brother had connived at the attempt to carry her off. He had been drinking with Mohun and Hill early in the evening at the Horse Shoe, in Drury Lane, and was to tell them when she came out of Page's house, and which way she was to go home. Elizabeth Walker, Mrs. Bracegirdle's servant, had given, as we have seen, important evidence as to the small share Mohun had taken in the fatal fray between Hill and Mountford. She stated that she had given the same evidence before the justices at Hicks's Hall, and had been much abused and distracted by the players on that account. Her mistress had said of her that she gave evidence that confounded them, and another had cried, "Hang her, a jade, pull her by the coat!" Did not return to her mistress after giving evidence before the justices; she was afraid; heard that she would be "rattled off" for what she had said, "and they," said the witness, "being all players, I was afraid, because players have a worse reputation than other people." She stated, moreover, that after their coming home from Drury Lane there was a discourse between her old and young mistress as to Captain Hill's waiting at the door, and his saying that he waited but to ask

her pardon, and would then go home to his lodgings. Witness offered, with her mistress's leave, to go out and demand Captain Hill's sword, so that then he might be safely admitted. But her mistress had called her a "prating slut," and said that if Hill "begged her pardon upon his knees never so, she would not forgive him, nor see him more." This witness's evidence was not impugned by the prosecution, and was in great part supported by the testimony of her fellow-servant, Ann Jones, and others.

Undoubtedly, the weak point in the case for the prosecution was a want of sufficient evidence that Hill and Mohun were really waiting for Mountford; it being clear that they did not stand in the actor's direct path to his house, but rather apart from it, although, as one of the witnesses explained, "They that stand in Howard Street can see who goeth down to Mr. Mountford's house, and who goeth up Surrey Street"; that they did not on his approach advance and molest him, but that, on the contrary, he was the first to address them, and that no violence was used at all, until he had spoken disparagingly of Hill. It was in evidence, also, that Mohun and Mountford had met upon friendly terms, there being an absence of all proof of previous animus on Lord Mohun's part against Mountford, Hill's vague threats being no evidence against Lord Mohun in that respect, while the actor's dying expressions went to show Mohun's innocence of share in the murder.

His witnesses having given their evidence, Lord Mohun addressed the court. "My lords, I hope it will be no disadvantage to me my not summing up my evidence like a lawyer, being a young man. I think I have made it plainly appear that there never was any former quarrel or malice between Mr. Mountford and me. I have also made appear the reason why we stayed so long in the street, which was for Mr. Hill to speak with Mrs. Bracegirdle and ask her pardon, and I stayed with him as my friend. So it plainly appeareth I had no hand in killing of Mr. Mountford, and upon the confidence of my own innocency I surrendered myself, and I commit myself to this honourable house, where I know I shall have all the justice in the world."

"Has your lordship no more to say?" asks the Lord High Steward.

"No, my lord," Mohun answers; "but I am innocent of the fact, and leave myself wholly to your lordships."

Their lordships did not immediately proceed to give judgment upon the case.

There were at that time no 'law-lords' in the Upper House. The Marquis of Carmarthen had been appointed Lord High Steward of the tribunal, because, holding the office of President of the Council, he was entitled to precedence of all the nobility. Their lordships therefore summoned to their assistance the com-

mon law judges to pronounce upon the law of the case. Lord Chief Justice Holt, Lord Chief Justice Treby, and other judges, appeared at the bar of the House with that object. Various noble lords proposed questions to the judges. Among the most important of these questions was one proposed by the Earl of Kingston—"whether a person knowing of the design of another to lie in wait to assault a third man, who happeneth to be killed (when the person who knew of that design is present), be guilty in law of the same crime with the party who had the design and killed him, though he had no actual hand in his death?" To this somewhat confused interrogatory, the judges replied that the first person mentioned would not be guilty of murder or manslaughter. The Earl of Nottingham varied the question, rather strengthening it against the prisoner, and putting it, "Whether a person knowing of the design of another to lie in wait to assault a third man, *and accompanying him in that design,*" etc. This, the judges held, would clearly be murder in the person that did accompany the other in his design. Other questions were put; but the case, it was clear, turned upon matters of fact rather than law. Was there an intention on the part of Hill to assault Mountford, and was Mohun privy to that intention? If so, was the meeting with Mountford, at which the assault took place, the result of accident or of design on the part of *both* Hill and Mohun?

Each peer pronounced his decision singly ; the youngest baron speaking first, the Lord High Steward last. Fourteen peers found Lord Mohun guilty of the murder of William Mountford ; sixty-nine found him not guilty, the Lord High Steward voting with the majority. Lord Mohun accordingly quitted the court a free man.

It has been a fashion among historians to assert that the decision was an unjust one. Lord Macaulay especially impeaches it as a public scandal. He considers that the crime of murder was fully brought home to the prisoner, and declares that such was the unanimous opinion of the public. "Had the issue," he proceeds, "been tried by Holt and twelve plain men at the Old Bailey, there can be no doubt that a verdict of guilty would have been returned." This preference for an Old Bailey jury over a tribunal composed of all the noblemen of England is characteristic of the popular historian. Going carefully over the report of the trial, we find it hard to agree with his lordship in this respect, and are led to the impression that a common jury, especially a modern one, with a skilful advocate pleading the prisoner's cause and damaging the case for the prosecution in every possible way, would have arrived at a verdict identical with the finding of the House of Lords. "All the newsletters, all the coffeehouse orators," says Macaulay, "complained that the blood of

the poor was shed with impunity by the great. Wits remarked that the only fair thing about the trial was the show of ladies in the gallery," etc.] These critics of the decision were precisely of the class who would make the most noise and conduct themselves the least reasonably in the matter, who would not trouble themselves to examine the evidence of the case, even if they had the opportunity of doing so—they probably had not—but would content themselves with being exceedingly angry that they had lost a skilful actor, never wearied of labouring for their amusement, the while his loss was to be attributed to the dissolute doings of a boy-noble. The public generally were of opinion that a grievous wrong had been done, for which *some one* ought to be punished, and Hill having escaped, why should not his friend Mohun suffer in his stead? Evelyn ascribes the acquittal of Mohun to his judges' "commiseration of his youth," and possibly that consideration determined the decision of certain of the lords. It should be borne in mind, too, that the death of Mountford occurred in times when much leniency was shown to the brawler and the duellist, and that Mohun's share in the sad event could only "constructively" be regarded as murder. Certainly he had not struck the fatal blow. He stood apart, little more guilty than a second in a duel—to take the worst view of his case.

We are by no means disposed to set up Mohun as a

hero, or anything like it. Probably a less satisfactory subject even for the modern system of "rehabilitation" could hardly be selected. But in the matter of Mountford's death, we are disposed to think that he has incurred a larger share of opprobrium than was strictly his due. He has been treated in this matter as "a dog with a bad name,"—in other respects he sufficiently deserved his evil repute,—and has met with the proverbial fate of a dog so situated. Of late years, moreover, he has had to bear the additional ignominy of appearing as "the villain," in Mr. Thackeray's delightful novel of "Esmond."

The after-events of Lord Mohun's life, by no means a profitable one altogether, terminating with his fatal duel with the Duke of Hamilton in Hyde Park in 1714, we may recount upon some future occasion.

Mrs. Mountford was advised to appeal against the judgment of the House of Peers, or probably to apply for a new trial: the case could hardly be carried to a higher tribunal. Narcissus Luttrell enters in his Diary:—

"28th February, 1692. The House of Lords were yesterday on the Debate of the complaint of Lord Mohun, about Mrs. Mountford having brought an appeal against him. They put it off till Friday, when the judges are ordered to attend.

"4th March. Lord Mohun's case was heard yesterday,



but Mrs. Mountford not having brought her appeal, nothing was done in it."

No further mention is to be found of the matter until later in the year, when we read,—

"3rd October. Lord Mohun lies very ill at Bath.

"19th October. Mrs. Mountford has petitioned the Queen for her father's pardon, which it is believed may be granted if she withdraw her appeal against Lord Mohun."

Mrs. Mountford's father, one Percival, a player, had in the interim, it seems, been found guilty of "clipping." A compromise was effected. Her father was pardoned on condition that she ceased to seek vengeance for her husband's death. There was an end to all proceedings in relation to the death of the hapless actor.

In 1720, Will Mountford's plays were published in two volumes by Tonson. "In this age of learning," says the preface, "when the works of the ingenious are perpetually collected and sought after by most curious persons, we doubt not but the writings of the famous Mr. Mountford will be acceptable to all encouragers of these entertainments."

The original plays are, "The Injured Lovers," "The Successful Strangers," "Greenwich Park," and "Dr. Faustus." Two others are added, "King Edward III., with the Fall of Mortimer, Earl of March," and "Henry II., King of England, with the Death of Rosamond,"

“ which,” the editor writes, “ though not wholly composed by him, it is presumed he had at least a share in fitting them for the stage, otherwise it cannot be supposed he would have taken the liberty of writing dedications to them.” They were written by one Mr. Bancroft, and given by him to Mountford.

## CHAPTER II.

## MISTRESS WOFFINGTON.

IN October, 1741, Horace Walpole wrote to Sir Horace Mann, at Florence : " I have been two or three times at the play, very unwillingly ; for nothing was ever so bad as the actors, except the company. There is much in vogue here a Mrs. Woffington, a bad actress ; but she has life." Walpole and his friends were not much disposed to admire anything or anybody. Of plays and players they were particularly severe critics. About a year before the letter to Mann, Walpole's other close friend, Mr. Conway, had written to him, evidently in reference to some previous remark upon the subject : " So you cannot bear Mrs. Woffington ? Yet all the town is in love with her. To say the truth, I am glad to find somebody to keep me in countenance, for I think she is an impudent Irish-faced girl."

It is certain that these fastidious gentlemen were in a woeful minority. The actress had made her first appearance before a London audience at Covent Garden Theatre

on the 6th of November, 1740. Rich, the manager, had seen her playing *Sir Harry Wildair* at Dublin in the spring of that year, and forthwith had secured her services for his ensuing season. Her success in London was beyond question.

She was an Irish girl ; that was true enough. As for being "Irish-faced," where was the reproach? Her loveliness could not for a moment be disputed. Tom Davies describes her enthusiastically as "the most beautiful woman that ever adorned a theatre." Almost as much may be gathered from the portraits of her still extant—the Hogarth, for instance, now in the collection of the Garrick Club ; as Lamb wrote of it, "the Woffington (a true Hogarth) on a couch, dallying and dangerous." And there is an engraving by Faber, after a portrait by Eccard, painted in 1745. The lady represented is certainly a beauty : her features refined, if not perfectly regular ; the lips full, but most shapely ; the nose straight and delicately modelled ; the eyes large, dark, and brilliant, with arched, mobile, strongly defined eyebrows. She wears no powder, but oak-leaves are twined among the waving rich brown tresses that stream down to her shoulders ; her costume is one of tangled, crumpled satin draperies, such as painters much affected in those days ; a striped scarf floats across her, fastened by a pearl buckle ; she bears in her white tapering Vandyke hands a large handsomely bound volume of Shakespeare.

A figure of the poet is seen, in one of his most admired attitudes, engraved upon the cover of the book.

Her origin was humble enough. She is said to have been born in Dame Street, Dublin, in the year 1719; her father a journeyman bricklayer, her mother a washer woman. Yet some small measure of education she obtained at a day school between her fifth and tenth years. Her father dying, however, she could no longer be spared from home; there was an end of her schooling; she helped her mother at the wash-tub. Sent to draw water from the Liffey, she was seen by a certain Madame Violante, who was much struck with the grace and good looks of the little girl, and forthwith offered to engage her as an apprentice.

Madame Violante was an Italian rope-dancer, famed for her feats of strength and agility. During the years 1726 and 1727 she had exhibited her extraordinary performances in London, meeting with great success. In 1728 or so she opened a booth in Dublin. Her achievements were not wholly pleasing; she made forcible appeals to the lovers of the dreadful and the dangerous. She danced upon the high rope with children in some way appended to her feet, by way of enhancing the difficulties of her task and affording the public the prized spectacle of imperilled life. As Madame Violante's apprentice, Mistress Margaret Woffington first appeared in public, tied to the feet of her mistress.

But at last these exciting entertainments began to pall upon the Dublin public. A change of programme became very desirable. In London "The Beggar's Opera" was just then, as the old joke described the case, making Gay rich and Rich gay. Madame Violante produced the work in Dublin, providing appropriate scenery and decorations ; but, in view of the fact that her booth was unlicensed by the authorities, assigning the characters, not to mature performers, but to a company of children. Already in London a troop of Lilliputians, as they were called, had successfully represented "The Beggar's Opera," when we read, "in order that the childish exhibition might be supported in all its branches, the manager contrived to send a book of the songs across the stage, by a flying Cupid, to Frederick Prince of Wales." It was, probably, in imitation of this performance, that Madame Violante duly instructed her apprentices and pupils, and produced her infantile version of the piece. *Polly Peachum* was impersonated by little Woffington, whose mother, it would seem, at this time kept a huckster's shop on Ormond Quay. Other of the juvenile performers adhered to the profession of the stage, and arrived at distinction in future years. Master Barrington, who played *Filch*, was known subsequently as a successful low comedian skilled in Irish characters. Master Isaac Sparks, the representative of *Peachum*, figured at a later date as an admired clown and actor of low comedy.

Miss Betty Barnes, the *Captain Macheath*, was afterwards, as Mrs. Martin, and, by a second marriage, as Mrs. Workman, an actress of considerable reputation.

In a few years the managers of the old-established theatre in Smock Alley grew jealous of the success of Madame Violante's booth; the authority of the Lord Mayor was invoked, and the performances upon that unlicensed stage were peremptorily forbidden. New theatres were presently built in Rainsford Street, beyond the jurisdiction of the mayor, and in Aungier Street. Mrs. Woffington was now chiefly known as a dancer, and was required to entertain the public between the acts, or in the intervals of the performance. She was a favourite, however, and her every appearance was welcomed with applause. But she was entrusted with no character of importance until, in 1737, at the Aungier Street Theatre she appeared as *Ophelia*, achieving genuine success in the part. "She now," writes a contemporary critic, "began to unveil those beauties and display those graces and accomplishments which, for so many years afterwards, charmed mankind. Her ease, elegance, and simplicity in *Polly*, in "The Beggar's Opera," with the natural manner of her singing the songs, pleased much. Her girls were esteemed excellent, and her *Miss Lucy*, in "The Virgin Unmasked" of Fielding, brought houses. But she never displayed herself to more advantage than in characters where she assumed the other sex." Her

figure is described as "a model of perfection." On the occasion of her benefit she appeared in the farce of "The Female Officer," by Brooke, after having personated the *Phyllis* of Steele's comedy of "The Conscious Lovers." It was not until some two years later that she first essayed the character of *Sir Harry Wildair*, acquiring by that representation a fame that endured throughout her career.

Even when Lamb, some forty years ago, ventured upon his special pleading for the artificial comedy of the last century, Farquhar had almost ceased to be an acted dramatist. The comedy of "The Constant Couple," of which *Sir Harry Wildair* is the hero, vanished from the stage more than half a century since. In truth, comedies can rarely be expected to endure : they picture manners, and manners change ; they become possessed at last of merely an archaic sort of interest, and fail to please playgoers, who are not antiquarians. Farquhar met with severe criticism even in his own day. Pope accused him of writing "pert, low dialogue ;" Steele thought *Sir Harry Wildair* decidedly "low." His comedies were pronounced, from the first, deficient in refinement and in "an air of good breeding." They thrived rather upon their humour than their wit ; they are scarcely works of art ; and yet they are ingenious enough ; while, in regard to action, briskness, and animal spirits, they know few equals in the whole dramatic repertory. The plots are generally wild frolics ; the dialogue is a string of jests



and absurdities; the characters seem all to have been tipping champagne before entering upon the scene.

After the death of Wilks, the original *Sir Harry*, "The Constant Couple" had been shelved for seven years; no actor had ventured to play the part. Farquhar himself had been wont to declare that when Wilks died there would no longer be a *Wildair*. In London, Mrs. Woffington did not undertake the character until she had thoroughly gained the good will of her audience as *Sylvia*, in Farquhar's "Recruiting Officer;" as *Lady Sadlife*, in Cibber's "Double Gallant;" and as *Aura*, in Charles Johnson's "Country Lasses." She appeared at last as *Sir Harry*, "by particular desire," repeating the character twenty times during her first season. The fame of her Dublin success had reached Covent Garden. The theatre was crowded to witness her performances; the delight of the town with the new actress seemed to know no bounds. The best critics hastened to applaud her exertions. Nor was her triumph, as Tate Wilkinson points out, merely the whim of a winter. "She remained the unrivalled *Wildair* during her life. . . . She appeared with the true spirit of a well-bred rake of quality. . . . Her ease, manner of address, vivacity, and figure of a young man of fashion were never more happily exhibited. The best proof of this matter," he continues, "is the well-known success and profit she brought to the different theatres in England and Ireland, wherever

her name was published for *Sir Harry Wildair*. The managers had recourse to her for this character whenever they feared the want of an audience ; and, indeed, for some years before she died, as she never by her articles of engagement was to play it but with her own consent, she always conferred a favour on the manager, whenever she changed her sex and filled the house."

Garrick dissented from the general opinion of Mrs. Woffington's *Sir Harry*. It was a great attempt for a woman, he was willing to admit, but still it was not *Sir Harry Wildair*. No woman, he urged, could ever so overcome the physical difficulty of voice and figure as to identify herself with a male character. The justice of this objection is obvious enough. The character of *Sir Harry*, however, is not to be judged by ordinary standards ; it hardly affects to be real or to resemble nature ; it is the creation of Farquhar—an incarnation of fantastic sportiveness. And something, it is clear, the part might gain at the hands of a female interpreter ; at whatever cost to her, a measure of its grossness would disappear. Much that *Wildair* is required to say and do would be in such wise deprived of significance, and real advantage would accrue to the representation. At any rate, when, two seasons later, Garrick himself undertook the character, the result was very complete failure. He played the part upon two occasions only, and then abandoned it for ever.

It seems agreed that Mrs. Woffington's voice was deficient in music—was even harsh in tone. The defect may have been a qualification for her assumption of male characters. "Mrs. Woffington is much improved," wrote Mrs. Delany in 1752, "and did the part of *Lady Townley* better than I have seen it done since Mrs. Oldfield's time. Her person is fine, her arms a little ungainly, and her voice disagreeable; but she pronounces her words perfectly well, and she speaks sensibly." Upon another occasion Mrs. Delany complains of the actress that she spoiled her figure by "the enormous size of her hoops"—hoops being then very much in fashion. When Foote presented his "Diversions of a Morning" at the Haymarket Theatre, he ridiculed the players of the day, imitating them, while allotting them occupations in the streets. To Quin was assigned the post of a watchman, with a sonorous cry of "Past twelve o'clock, and a cloudy morning!" Delane, who was alleged to have but one eye, was appointed a beggar-man in St. Paul's Churchyard; Ryan, whose voice was sharp and shrill, a razor-grinder; and Mrs. Woffington, because of her harsh tones, an orange-woman at the playhouse.

Rich had engaged the actress for Covent Garden Theatre upon a salary of nine pounds per week; but at the end of the season, tempted probably by an increased rate of payment, she joined the standard of Drury Lane. She now appeared as *Rosalind*; as *Nerissa*; as *Lady*

*Brute*, in "The Provoked Wife ;" and as *Mrs. Sullen*, in "The Beaux' Stratagem." On the occasion of her benefit she played *Clarissa*, in "The Confederacy" of Sir John Vanbrugh. This was Garrick's first season in London. On the 19th of October, 1741, he had made his first appearance at the theatre in Goodman's Fields. In the May following his services were transferred to Drury Lane.

Soon Garrick was at the feet of the beautiful and irresistible Mrs. Woffington. For three years he was her devoted admirer, a fond suitor for her hand. As she informed Arthur Murphy, she was so near being married to Garrick, that he had tried the wedding-ring on her finger. And, after a manner, she loved him, it would seem. It was scarcely to be wondered at. He was young, handsome, vivacious, and—the fashion. He was absolutely at the head of his profession. Herself an actress, she could not but recognize his consummate genius as an actor. They had visited Dublin together during the summer of 1742, and been received with extraordinary enthusiasm. "Garrick was caressed by all ranks of people as a theatrical phenomenon." So wrote the historian of the Irish stage, who acknowledges that Mrs. Woffington largely contributed towards his success, and was nearly as great a favourite. The crowds attracted to the theatre during the hottest months of the year produced an "epidemic distemper, which seized

upon and carried off numbers, and from this circumstance was called the Garrick fever." Mrs. Woffington, thanks, perhaps, to the assistance and instructions of her fellow-player, now took rank as an actress of tragedy. She appeared as *Cordelia*, *Belvidera*, and *Lady Anne*, to the *Lear*, *Pierre*, and *Richard* of Garrick.

Returned from Dublin, the lady, with Garrick and Macklin, agreed to "keep house" together. They formed something of a partnership, were understood to have but one purse between them, and each by turn managed the affairs of their house, No. 6, Bow Street. They had planned to open a sort of histrionic academy, to teach acting to all comers; but this scheme was speedily abandoned. Altogether, their establishment had its difficulties. Garrick was accused of being parsimonious—throughout his life a certain thriftiness that characterized him was made the subject of much bitter attack. On the other hand, complaint arose that Mrs. Woffington was far too lavish in her expenditure. "With his domestic saving we have nothing to do," said Dr. Johnson, when the matter was brought under his notice. "I remember drinking tea with him long ago, when Peg Woffington made it, and he grumbled at her for making it too strong." When the story was repeated to Reynolds, he mentioned an additional circumstance: "'Why,' cried Garrick of the tea, 'it's as red as blood!'"

The first quarrel was with Macklin. He, with Garrick

and other members of the company, had revolted against the misrule of Fleetwood, the manager of Drury Lane ; but Garrick, finding the cause hopeless, owing to the persistent opposition of the Lord Chamberlain, made a separate peace for himself, and resumed his professional duties. Macklin, deeming himself betrayed, became thereupon Garrick's bitter foe. To the end of his very long life Macklin persisted in depreciating, reproaching, and maligning his former comrade. After a few years of fondness the lovers parted. Garrick hinted his desire to be released from his promise to marry Mrs. Woffington. "Go, sir !" she said indignantly. "Henceforward, I separate myself from you for ever. From this hour I decline to see you, or to speak with you, except in the course of our professional business, or in the presence of a third person." And she kept her word. She was very angry, and she never forgave him. She returned his letters and presents. He craved permission, so malice reported, to retain, as a memento of her, a pair of very valuable diamond shoe-buckles, which she had given him in the early days of their intimacy. The town greatly diverted itself with this quarrel between the fond actor and the frail actress. Various lampoons appeared in the public prints ; caricatures, bearing hard upon the gentleman, were exhibited in the print-shop windows. But Garrick's conduct in the matter disentitles him to sympathy ; he well deserved, indeed, the public derision

and contempt that he incurred. Dazzled by the beauty and the brilliant histrionic gifts of the actress, he had wooed and besought her hand; abruptly disentangling himself from his engagement, he was, least of all, entitled to reproach her with perfidy, or to dwell upon the laxity of her mode of life.

For a time he had been content enough to play *Desgrieux* to her *Manon Lescaut*. She had been his "lovely Peggy" in the past. He had addressed her the lines beginning—

"Once more I'll tune my vocal shell,  
To hills and dales my passion tell—  
A flame which time can never quell,  
Which burns for thee, my Peggy!"

But the fire of his love had now absolutely gone out. He reviled her cruelly enough, all the circumstances of the case being considered. She treated him with fierce scorn, laughing loudly at him by way of masking, probably, the heartache she really endured, and on all sides relating her version of the story of their loves, which placed him in a very disadvantageous light. They met only on the stage. They were both servants of the same manager, and compelled to act together. But, in 1747, he became joint patentee with Lacy at Drury Lane, and the fact of her being a member of his company occasioned serious embarrassment to both. Immediate escape was not possible; and her position in the



theatre was additionally mortifying from the antagonism of the other actresses, Mrs. Cibber, Mrs. Pritchard, and Mrs. Clive, all members of the company, and all claiming the earliest consideration in regard to the performance of what are called "leading parts." "No two women of high rank," writes Tom Davies, "ever hated one another more unreservedly than those great dames of the theatre, Mrs. Clive and Mrs. Woffington. In the green-room, their many bitter conflicts, their frequent interchange of angry looks, and words, and gestures occasioned great diversion. Mrs. Clive was coarse, violent, and very rude ; Mrs. Woffington was well bred, seemingly very calm, and at all times mistress of herself. She blunted the sharp speeches of Mrs. Clive by her apparently civil, but keen and sarcastic replies ; thus she often threw Clive off her guard by an arch severity, which the warmth of the other could not easily parry."

At the end of the season Mrs. Woffington quitted Garrick's theatre, and accepted an engagement at Covent Garden, where she remained three years. She now was possessed of ample opportunities for the display of her gifts, as an actress of both tragedy and comedy. She was held to be the best *Portia* and *Rosalind* of her time ; subsequently, as *Lady Macbeth*, she was ranked next to the famous Mrs. Pritchard. As the heroine of Rowe's tragedy of "Lady Jane Grey" she commanded extraordinary applause ; while the classical beauty of her



performance of *Andromache* and *Hermione* won general admiration. She had visited Paris, indeed, expressly to witness the representations of the great French actress, Mademoiselle Dumesnil, whose grace of action and skilful elocution had made her famous. As *Veturia*, in Thomson's play of "Coriolanus"—*Veturia* being the mother of the hero—Mrs. Woffington did not hesitate, with a view to the more perfect representation of the character, to paint wrinkles upon her beautiful face and to assume a look of old age. "What other actress would do this?" a critic of the time pointedly inquired. She undertook, at a very short notice, upon Mrs. Cibber falling suddenly ill, to assume her part of *Constance* in "King John." The audience, informed of this change in the cast, seemed overcome with surprise, and remained silent for some minutes. Presently, however, by repeated applause they strove to make amends for their apparent indifference, and to reward the exertions of the accomplished actress, who had come forward so gallantly to aid the management.

It is clear, however, these successes notwithstanding, that the lady's greatest triumphs were in comedy. The critics dwelt with almost cruel persistence upon "her deplorable tragedy voice," and the discord of her declamation. As *Calista*, in "The Fair Penitent," it was said that all her merit was comprehended in elegance of figure; "she was a *Lady Townley* in heroics, and barked out her

penitence with as dissonant notes of voice as ever offended a critical ear." As *Zara*, in "The Mourning Bride," her figure and deportment were found irreproachable; "but the violent as well as the tender passions grated abominably in her dissonant voice." Her "tragic utterance" is described as "the bane of tender ears;" she "never appeared to less advantage than as *Lady Randolph*; flat in the calm, and dissonant in the impassioned passages." Yet the same critic has nothing but praise for her representation of such characters as *Sylvia*, in "The Recruiting Officer;" *Beatrice*, in "Much Ado about Nothing;" and *Charlotte*, in "The Non-Juror." She had studied elocution under Cibber, a pompous actor of an old-fashioned school, who delighted in intoning his speeches, and was fond of what was facetiously called the "Ti-tum-ti" style of delivery. Mrs. Woffington had toiled zealously in this branch of her profession; but the effort to impart music to her utterance probably deprived her eloquence of all nature and pathos, and lent an air of artifice and affectation to her best performances in tragedy.

She quitted Covent Garden in 1751, at the close of the season. She was offended at the names of Quin, Barry, and Mrs. Cibber being printed in letters of unusual size upon the playbills which should have been devoted to the comedies in which she appeared. She felt herself subordinated to them, and slighted accordingly. Moreover, she was too frequently called upon suddenly to act

as a stop-gap, when the other players were, or affected to be, too ill to appear. On one occasion "Jane Shore" had been announced ; but it was postponed, "The Constant Couple" being advertised to take its place, when the playbill was half occupied with the names of the tragedians, and with particulars of their future arrangements. At five o'clock Mrs. Woffington sent word to the manager that she was ill, and could not play. Upon her next appearance, she was received with a storm of disapprobation, which she attributed to a conspiracy on the part of the manager's friends. The public, however, had some reason to complain of the many disappointments to which they had been subjected. "Whoever," writes Tate Wilkinson, describing the scene, "is living, and saw her that night, will own that they never beheld any figure half so beautiful since. Her anger gave a glow to her complexion, and added lustre to her eyes. They treated her very rudely, bade her ask pardon, and threw orange-peel. She behaved with great resolution, and treated their rudeness with glorious contempt. She left the stage, was called for, and with infinite persuasion was prevailed upon to return. However, she did ; walked forward, and told them she was there ready and willing to perform her character if they chose to permit her ; that the decision was theirs—*on* or *off*, just as they pleased, it was a matter of indifference to her. The 'ons' had it, and all went smoothly afterwards."

Yet Wilkinson was not a witness especially disposed to favour Mrs. Woffington. Something of a ventriloquist and a mimic by profession, he had roused her ire by his caricatures of her tragic tones. She had exerted herself to prevent his being employed at Covent Garden. Afterwards, in Dublin, he had played *Dollalolla*, in the burlesque of "Tom Thumb," avowedly imitating Mrs. Woffington. "Take me off! A puppy!" she cried, angrily. "And in Dublin, too! If he dare attempt it, he will be stoned to death." But by his own showing his mimicry was received with uproarious laughter.

The two patent theatres being closed to her by her quarrels with both Rich and Garrick, she returned to her old friends in Ireland, who received her very warmly. Sheridan, who had become manager of the Dublin Theatre, agreed with her for one season at four hundred pounds. By appearing only in four of her best parts, she benefited the management to the amount of four thousand pounds. Next season her salary was doubled. She remained with Sheridan until the disastrous close of his management in March, 1754.

It was a time of great political excitement. Dublin was rent by party feeling. There was a supercilious court party; there was a vehement popular party. The players failed to keep friends with both sides. Sheridan had instituted a Dublin Beefsteak Club, in imitation of the more famous London Beefsteak Club, first founded in 1735.

It was maintained at his sole expense. The thirty or forty members were, for the most part, noblemen or members of Parliament. "The gay, volatile, enchanting Woffington," writes Hitchcock in his "Irish Stage," "being the only female admitted, was by unanimous consent voted into the chair, which she filled with a grace and ease peculiar to herself." She had frankly avowed that she preferred the company of men to that of women; the latter, she said, talked of nothing but "silks and scandal." The club was without political intention or object, but the public would not think so, and Sheridan incurred great unpopularity. The storm broke out upon the production of a poor tragedy founded upon the Mahomet of Voltaire. The audience applied certain lines to the court party, and required their repetition. Sheridan laid aside the play for a month, but on its next representation a similar disturbance arose. Sheridan would not permit the offensive lines to be repeated. Mrs. Woffington was induced to appear, "to try what influence a fine woman could have upon an enraged multitude;" but in vain. The lady was credited with political sentiments and connections of an unpopular kind. The rioters proceeded forthwith to demolish the theatre, and fully accomplished their object. There was an end of Sheridan's management; of Mrs. Woffington's career in Ireland. She reappeared at Covent Garden in September, 1754, and was received with very hearty applause. Her London admirers had by no means forgotten her.

But her career was now drawing towards its close. On the occasion of her benefit, on the 24th of March, 1757, she had appeared as "the haughty, gallant, gay *Lothario*" in "The Fair Penitent:" an injudicious proceeding, for what actress can hope for genuine success as the hero of a tragedy? On the following 3rd of May she was seen upon the stage for the last time. From the beginning of the season, although she had striven hard to fulfil her duty towards the public, her health had failed her. There had been abatement of her wonted high spirits, decline of her marvellous beauty. Wilkinson has described the scene forcibly enough. "I was standing in the wings as Mrs. Woffington, in *Rosalind*, and Mrs. Vincent, in *Celia*, were going on the stage in the first act. . . . She went through *Rosalind* for four acts without my perceiving that she was in the least disordered; but in the fifth act she complained of great indisposition. I offered her my arm, the which she graciously accepted. I thought she looked softened in her manner, and had less of the 'hauteur.' When she came off at the quick change of dress, she again complained of being ill, but got accoutred, and returned to finish the part, and pronounced the epilogue speech: 'If it be true that good wine needs no bush,' etc. But, when arrived at, 'If I were a woman I would kiss as many of you as had beards,' etc., her voice broke—she faltered—endeavoured to go on, but could not proceed;

then, in a voice of tremor, exclaimed, 'O God! O God!' and tottered to the stage door speechless, where she was caught. The audience of course applauded till she was out of sight, and then sunk into awful looks of astonishment, both young and old, before and behind the curtain, to see one of the most handsome women of the age, a favourite principal actress, and who had for several seasons given high entertainment, struck so suddenly by the hand of Death, in such a time and place, and in the prime of life." It was thought that she could not survive many hours, but she lingered until the 28th of March, 1760, suffering severely, wrecked and broken, scarcely recognizable as the "lovely Peggy" of the past—the merest shadow of her former self. She had saved money, it appeared, and was able to bequeath some five thousand pounds to her sister, who had become the Hon. Mrs. Cholmondeley, an eccentric lady, obtaining frequent mention in the *Memoirs of Madame D'Arblay*. According to O'Keeffe, Mrs. Woffington maintained her mother during her life, and endowed certain almshouses at Teddington. This last statement has been questioned; but the actress's kindness of heart, tenderness and generosity of disposition, are not to be doubted. She had sinned much; her name finds a place in the most scandalous stories of the time. She was an actress, so far as her private life is concerned, quite of the Restoration pattern; and yet she was felt to have well merited

the terms of the monody written upon her death by Hoole, the translator of Tasso. He recorded the excellence of her professional life, and continued—

“Nor was thy worth to public scenes confined,  
Thou knew'st the noblest feelings of the mind;  
Thy ears were ever open to distress,  
Thy ready hand was ever stretched to bless,  
Thy breast humane for each unhappy felt,  
Thy heart for others' sorrows prone to melt,” etc.

It is to be remembered of her that to the public and to her art she had been faithful ever. She is thus described by Murphy, who knew her well: “Forgive her one female error, and it might fairly be said of her that she was adorned with every virtue; honour, truth, benevolence, and charity were her distinguishing qualities. Her understanding was superior to that of the generality of her sex. Her conversation was in a style of elegance, always pleasing and often instructive. She abounded in wit, but not of that wild sort which breaks out in sudden flashes, often troublesome and impertinent: her judgment restrained her within due bounds. On the stage she displayed her talents in the brightest lustre. Genteel comedy was her province. She possessed a fine figure, great beauty, and every elegant accomplishment.” “She had ever her train of admirers,” writes Wilkinson; “she possessed wit, vivacity, etc., but never permitted her love of pleasure and conviviality to occasion the least defect in her duty to the public as a performer. . . . She



was ever ready at the call of the audience, and, though in the possession of all the first line of characters, yet she never thought it improper or a degradation of her consequence to constantly play the *Queen* in 'Hamlet,' *Lady Anne* in 'Richard III.', and *Lady Percy* in 'Henry IV.',—parts which are mentioned as insults in the country if offered to a lady of consequence. She also cheerfully acted *Hermione* or *Andromache*; *Lady Pliant* or *Lady Touchwood*; *Lady Sadlife* or *Lady Dainty*; *Angelica* or *Mrs. Frail*; and several other alternately, as best suited the interests of her manager." Victor writes of her: "She never disappointed one audience in three winters, either by real or affected illness; and yet I have often seen her on the stage when she ought to have been in her bed." While the historian of the Irish stage contributes his testimony in her favour: "To her honour be it ever remembered, that, whilst in the zenith of her glory, courted and caressed by all ranks and degrees, it made no alteration in her behaviour; she remained the same gay, affable, obliging, good-natured Woffington to every one around her. . . . Not the lowest performer in the theatre did she refuse to play for: out of twenty-six benefits she acted in twenty-four. . . . Such traits of character must endear the memory of Mrs. Woffington to every lover of the drama."

## CHAPTER III.

## POOR PERDITA.

IN the middle of the last century, there was living at Bristol a merchant named Darby, by birth an American, who claimed to be a scion of the Irish house of Mac Dermott. He had married a descendant of the Seys family of Boverton Castle, Glamorganshire. Of this union had been born two children, a boy and a girl ; on the 27th November, 1758, a third child, christened Mary, first saw light ; and within a few years two sons came to increase the number of the family.

Mr. Darby occupied an old house said to have once formed part of St. Augustine's monastery. It adjoined the cathedral church and fronted the College-green. Little Miss Mary Darby—gipsy-faced, large-eyed, dark-browed (the lady has left on record a detailed description of her appearance as a child)—grew fond of listening to the pealing of the organ and the chanting of the choristers in the minster church,—of singing songs and reciting verses ; she could repeat Pope's

"Lines to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady," Mason's "Elegy on the Death of the Countess of Coventry," Lord Lyttelton's stanzas "The Heavy Hours," Gay's charming ballad "'Twas when the sea was rolling," and other pathetic pieces, when she was only seven years old ; and she played upon the harpsichord, and even produced doggerel lines of her own composing while she was still a mere child. Soon she was sent as a day-boarder to the school kept by the four sisters of Miss Hannah More at Bristol.

Mr. Darby lived in apparent affluence, and spent his money freely—a little too freely, perhaps. He was a restless, energetic man, with a strong inclination towards speculative ventures. He did not grow rich fast enough, he complained—his receipts could not keep pace with his expenditure ; and he became impatient to make a great fortune at a single blow, as it were. So he threw himself heart and soul and capital into a wild project for establishing on a grand scale a whale fishery on the coast of Labrador : purposing to civilize the Esquimaux, and avail himself of their services in the undertaking. Full of this strange business, he quitted England for a residence of at least two years in America, leaving his wife and four children (death had taken one away) to endure his absence as best they might while looking forward to his return laden with profit and covered with glory.

At first, indeed, there seemed some hope of his success. He had been patronized and encouraged by Lords Chatham, Northington, Bristol, Hilsborough, Sir Hugh Palliser, and other influential noblemen and gentlemen. He corresponded regularly with his family ; they were in receipt of an income punctually paid. But there came a change : disaster and ruin. The scheme failed ; the Indians rose, destroyed the settlement and works, murdered the workmen, and turned adrift the produce of their toil ; while the British Government declined to interfere or to assist the settlers by sending ships of war for their protection. Worse than all, at least it so seemed to poor Mrs. Darby, her husband had formed a new attachment in America. The infatuated man had ceased to care for his wife. He returned to England but to make some slender provision for her, and to arrange the terms of their formal separation.

The house at Bristol was given up, and the furniture sold. Mrs. Darby and her children came up to London. The mother went to board in the family of a clergyman at Chelsea, and the children were sent to schools in the neighbourhood. This arrangement lasted for some few years. But Mr. Darby would not or could not be punctual in the payment of his wife's allowance. In her pecuniary distress she opened a small boarding-school for girls at Little Chelsea ; her daughter, Mary, then about fourteen, rendering such assistance as she

could in the education of the pupils. But the perverse husband prohibited this arrangement.

He was too poor to supply his wife with sufficient money for her maintenance, and too proud to permit her, by her own exertions, to earn a livelihood. The school had been started during his absence on a second mission in connection with the Labrador scheme, but on his return, by his positive command, Mrs. Darby broke up her establishment at Chelsea, and took lodgings in Marylebone. For a short time, it is probable, she was again in receipt of her scanty income; and Miss Mary Darby was sent to finish her education at Oxford House, Marylebone.

At this academy the young lady was taught dancing by Mr. Hussey, the ballet-master at Covent Garden Theatre. To him was due the first suggestion that she should assist her embarrassed family by adopting the stage as a profession. The ballet-master was struck by his pupil's graceful figure and pretty face, and had probably listened with admiration to her recitations from the poets. Shortly afterwards Miss Darby was introduced to Mr. Garrick at his house in the Adelphi. This was in 1776, the last year of Garrick's appearance upon the stage. The veteran actor was profuse in his applause—did all he could to encourage the novice; he even proposed to assist her by taking part in the play chosen for her *début*, and engaged to represent *Lear* to the

*Cordelia* of Miss Mary Darby on the boards of Drury Lane Theatre.

Until the arrival of the period fixed for her first appearance, Mr. Garrick desired that the young lady would attend the performances at his theatre as constantly as possible. He expressed himself sanguine as to her success ; at each rehearsal, seemed to grow more and more confident on the subject. Meanwhile, she was an object of attention at Drury Lane as the new *Cordelia*—the young pupil of the Roscius. Garrick was delighted ; in his high spirits he would sometimes dance a minuet with his pupil, or beg her to sing to him the favourite ballads of the day ; especially he admired the tone of her voice, which, he avowed, always reminded him of his favourite actress, Mrs. Cibber.

But this performance of “King Lear” was not destined to take place. Mr. Garrick one morning received a letter informing him that an advantageous marriage had induced Miss Darby to relinquish her theatrical prospects. The manager concealed his disappointment ; said nothing of the trouble he had been put to ; he congratulated the bride most cordially, and expressed the warmest wishes for her future happiness. A Mr. Robinson had fallen in love with the young *Cordelia*. He was an articled clerk in the offices of Messrs. Vernon and Elderton, of Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane, Solicitors. He had been educated at

Harrow, a contemporary of Sheridan; was alleged to have great expectations from a rich old uncle; and was looking forward to advancement in his profession, having but three months more of his time of service to complete. Above all, he professed himself passionately in love with Miss Darby.

The young man seems to have urged his suit adroitly enough. He operated upon the affections of the daughter—upon the fears of the mother. He represented to Mrs. Darby the displeasure her husband would surely evince on his return to England \* at finding that his daughter had become an actress; he pointed out how escape from a hazardous and toilsome life might be secured by an honourable and prosperous marriage, such as he proposed. To the daughter he was never tired of dwelling upon the devotedness of his love. He was successful; he even persuaded Mrs. Darby to allow the marriage to be clandestine; pleading as a reason for this his fears of

\* Mr. Darby, however, does not appear to have been troubled with any vital anxieties touching his family. After the complete failure of his Labrador scheme, some of his influential patrons secured him the command of a small ordnance vessel. He was present at the siege of Gibraltar, in 1783, and for his services on that occasion received the congratulations of General Elliot, and the thanks of the Board of Admiralty. He died in the naval service of the Russian government, about 1785. Mrs. Robinson published some affectionate stanzas to his memory. Mrs. Darby died in 1793, at the house of Mrs. Robinson, in St. James's Place. Through all their changes of fortune the most affectionate relations seem to have subsisted between the mother and daughter.

offending his rich relation ; his own youth ; and the fact that his period of service as a clerk was not expired. The marriage took place at St. Martin's Church, the bride being then about seventeen years of age.

The story of Mrs. Robinson's early life can only be gathered from her own memoirs—probably not the most impartial of histories. She would credit her husband with all the haste and secrecy which attended her marriage. Likely enough, however, some share in this may be fairly apportioned to the bride and her mother : in their straitened circumstances they could hardly be unwilling to secure a suitor who promised so well, and who was generally believed to be not less prosperous than he had represented. There was some little disenchantment, however, soon after the wedding. Mr. Robinson was discovered not to be the heir of a rich man—to have, indeed, no clear title to any future fortune whatever. True, he had expectations, that might or might not be realized. He was not the nephew but the illegitimate son of a man of fortune.

The newly married pair soon find themselves in urgent want of pecuniary assistance. They proceed upon a visit to Mr. Harris, Mr. Robinson's so-called *uncle*, living at Tregunter House, near Chepstow. Their reception is, upon the whole, favourable. Mr. Harris,—a rough-and-ready Squire Western sort of gentleman, a justice of the peace, and late sheriff of the county, who wears a brown



fustian coat, a scarlet waistcoat with narrow lace, woollen spatter-dashes, and a gold-laced hat, drinks much strong ale, and rides a Welsh pony for long hours together over his lands,—is surprised but not particularly angry; indeed, professes himself charmed with the bride; but is careful to tender no monetary aid to the young couple. Disappointed, they return to town after a few weeks' sojourn in Wales, apparently with the intention of living on thenceforward splendidly upon nothing a year.

Mr. Robinson, though he had received no money or promise of money from his rich relative, seems to have thought himself justified in cherishing confident hopes that something or other would sooner or later be done for him. Accordingly, he determined upon living fully up to the most prosperous view he could possibly take of his position. He removed from lodgings in Great Queen Street to a handsome newly built house, No. 13, in Hatton Garden, which he furnished luxuriously. He purchased an elegant phaeton and saddle horses, and supplied his wife with a costly wardrobe. He took her—charmingly dressed in pale pink satin with point lace trimming, wide hoop and high feathers—to entertainments at Ranelagh Gardens, and to concerts at the Pantheon. Mr. and Mrs. Robinson aspired to be people of fashion—persons of quality, and to be so regarded by the world of society around them.

When the frog attempts to arrive at the porportions

of the ox, we all know what happens. When an attorney without an income is found attitudinizing as a man of fortune, the probable result may be readily surmised. Mr. Robinson becomes more and more involved. Vulture-nosed money-lenders circle round him; creditors importune his pretty wife; poverty pinches his household. And then the attorney himself, according to his wife's showing,—and it is perhaps part of her own defence to accuse him,—is, in quite other than pecuniary matters, a by no means exemplary kind of person. He is fickle, faithless, bends before other and less worthy shrines of beauty, leaving his bride neglected and unvalued with such gay, giddy gentlemen as Lord Lyttelton and "Fighting" Fitzgerald to whisper their libertine love in her ear. Fitzgerald even attempts an abduction of pretty Mrs. Robinson, without the husband apparently greatly heeding.

To avoid his creditors, and in the hope of obtaining some immediate assistance from his uncle, Mr. Robinson takes his wife another journey into Wales; an unavailing expedition, however. Mr. Harris would do nothing—his mood was even less promising than before; this time he treated his visitors with rudeness—almost brutality. In Wales Mrs. Robinson gave birth to a daughter; but the rich relation was still pitiless. They return to London in deep distress. Mr. Robinson goes to prison.\* His wife

\* The man seems to have been thoroughly worthless. Miss

publishes a volume of poems which even the energetic patronage of the kind Duchess of Devonshire fails to force into any very remunerative demand. Then Mr. Brereton of Drury Lane suggests that the stage should be thought of once more—this time in earnest. Mrs. Robinson consents. Mr. Sheridan is introduced. Garrick, though he has retired, promises his countenance and support. A meeting takes place in the green-room of Drury Lane Theatre. The lady recites the chief scenes of *Juliet*, Mr. Brereton repeating the part of *Romeo*; and Garrick decides that the tragedy of “*Romeo and Juliet*” shall be produced forthwith for the *début* of Mrs. Mary Robinson.

The theatre is crowded with rank and fashion on the night of the 10th December, 1776—the green-room and wings are thronged with critics. Mr. Garrick sits in the orchestra to witness the performance of the new actress. She is so nervous she can hardly stand. All the encouragements of Mr. Sheridan and her other friends are needed to induce her to approach the audience. Presently she fronts the foot-lights: a very

Hawkins relates that while he was in prison work was offered him by which he might, in a great measure, have retrieved his position; but he was idle and dissipated, and would do nothing. “In this depth of misery his wife was eminently meritorious; she had her child to attend to, she did all the work of their apartments, she even scoured the stairs, and accepted the writing and the pay which he had refused.”

beautiful young woman in pale pink satin trimmed with lace and spangled with silver, with white feathers in her hair. She is very timid at first, but gains greater courage as the play proceeds and the applause increases. The curtain falls amidst a clamour of approbation. The new *Juliet* is a thorough success.

During the following month the lady essayed her second character : *Statira* in Nat Lee's "Alexander the Great," and was again well received. Her Persian *toilette* was much admired, though considered rather singular : for the actress wore neither hoop nor powder ; and her feet were encased in richly-jewelled sandals. Correctness of costume was an innovation, about which the public had not as yet quite made up its mind.

On the 24th February, 1777, Sheridan produced his comedy "A Trip to Scarborough," an adaptation from Sir John Vanbrugh's "Relapse," and Mrs. Robinson appeared in her third part, *Amanda*. There was a disturbance in the theatre. The audience had been led to expect a new work, and on their discovery that the play was merely an old acquaintance in disguise, they loudly expressed their disapprobation. Mrs. Yates, the *Berinthia* of the night, discomposed by the hissing, quitted the stage, leaving her younger playfellow to face the storm alone. Terribly alarmed, Mrs. Robinson glanced round her. Mr. Sheridan was in the wings, imploring her to remain upon the scene ; the Duke

of Cumberland in the stage-box cried out to the actress, "Take courage, it's not *you* they're hissing, but the play!" The lady curtsied her thanks; the house became gallant in a moment: forgot its grievance, put aside its ill-humour, applauded *Amanda* greatly, and permitted the play to proceed. Afterwards the comedy was successful, and remained for many years a stock-piece at Drury Lane. The only other part played by Mrs. Robinson during her first season at Drury Lane was *Fanny Sterling* in "The Clandestine Marriage," performed on the occasion of her benefit. Mr. Sheridan then desired the actress to undertake a part in his new comedy of the "School for Scandal." But there were reasons why this could not be. In the early part of the summer Mrs. Robinson gave birth to her second child, who only lived six weeks.

In the following season (1777-8) Mrs. Robinson appeared as *Ophelia* and *Lady Anne* to the *Hamlet* and *Richard* of Henderson; she played also the *Lady* in "Comus;" *Emily* in "The Runaway;" *Araminta* in "The Confederacy;" *Octavia* in "All for Love;" and in a forgotten farce called "Joseph Andrews." For her benefit she had announced her intention to appear as *Cordelia* to the *Lear* of Henderson. "Macbeth," however, was substituted — "Gentleman" Smith being the *Macbeth*, and Mrs. Robinson the *Lady*,—a character for which she was probably little suited. After the

tragedy a musical farce of her own composition called "The Lucky Escape" was produced; but in this she did not appear.

The actress had made great way in public favour—she was becoming a favourite with the town. She was not powerful, perhaps, but she was certainly pleasing; not a great artist but a very graceful one. She could not take the public by storm; but she could win them gradually, holding them just as securely at last. It was difficult to resist the beauty of her face and form—the charm of her voice. More than these was not required in many of her characters. She had no genius, but she had a cultivated cleverness which did nearly as well. She was very lovely, dressed beautifully, could be arch and sparkling, or tender and pathetic. The good-natured audience demanded no more—they gave her their hands and hearts without further question, thundering their applause.

For the summer season Mrs. Robinson had been engaged by Colman at the Haymarket; but though in the regular receipt of a considerable salary, she never once appeared on the stage. She claimed to play *Nancy Lovel* in Colman's comedy of "The Suicide;" the part had been originally allotted to her, though afterwards given to Miss Farren, for the two preceding seasons a favourite at the Haymarket. The character required little beyond good looks and a graceful figure,

to be displayed in male attire. It was generally admitted that Miss Farren was seen to more advantage in the dress of her sex. She declined to surrender *Nancy Lovel* to her sister actress, however, and Mrs. Robinson withheld her assistance from the theatre.

During the winter, Mrs. Robinson was re-engaged at Drury Lane. She appeared as *Lady Plume* in an after-piece called "The Camp," often attributed to Sheridan, but presumed to have been written by his friend Tickell, *à propos* of a real camp for the time established at Coxheath. She also played *Palmira* in "Mahomet," produced for the *début* of Garrick's pupil, John Bannister; *Miss Richly* in "The Discovery;" *Alinda* in "The Law of Lombardy;" *Cordelia*, on her benefit, repeating the character on Henderson's night; *Jacintha* in "The Suspicious Husband," and *Fidelia* in "The Plain Dealer." In the season 1779-80, she appeared as *Viola*, *Perdita*, *Rosalind*, *Oriana* in "The Inconstant," *Imogen*, *Mrs. Brady* in "The Irish Widow," and *Eliza Camply*, assuming the character of *Sir Harry Revel*, in the comedy of "The Miniature Picture," \* written by Lady

\* Walpole writes to the Rev. William Mason, on the 28th May, 1780:—"Lady Craven's comedy, called 'The Miniature Picture,' which she acted herself, with a genteel set, at her own house in the country, has been played at Drury Lane. The chief singularity was that she went to it herself the second night, in form; sat in the middle of the front row of the stage-box, much dressed, with a profusion of white bugles and plumes, to receive the public homage

Craven, afterwards Margravine of Anspach. At the close of the season, Mrs. Robinson quitted the stage.

due to her sex and loveliness. The Duchess of Richmond, Lady Harcourt, Lady Edgcombe, Lady Aylesbury, Mrs. Damer, Lord Craven, General Conway, Colonel O'Hara, Mr. Lenox, and I, were with her. It was amazing to see so young a woman entirely possess herself; but there is such an integrity and frankness in her consciousness of her own beauty and talents that she speaks of them with a *naïveté* as if she had no property in them, but only wore them as gifts of the gods. Lord Craven, on the contrary, was quite agitated by his fondness for her, and with impatience at the bad performance of the actors, which was wretched indeed; yet the address of the plot, which is the chief merit of the piece, and some lively pencilling, carried it off very well, though Parsons murdered the Scotch Lord, and Mrs. ROBINSON (who is supposed to be the favourite of the Prince of Wales) thought on nothing but her own charms and him."

In her memoirs Mrs. Robinson says:—"The last night of my appearance on the stage I represented the character of *Sir Harry Revel*, in the comedy of 'The Miniature Picture,' written by Lady Craven, and 'The Irish Widow.' On entering the green-room I informed Mr. Moody, who played in the farce, that I should appear no more after that night, and, endeavouring to smile while I sung, I repeated,—

'O joy to you all in full measure,  
So wishes and prays Widow Brady,'

which were the last lines of my song in 'The Irish Widow.' This effort to conceal the emotion I felt on quitting a profession I enthusiastically loved was of short duration; and I burst into tears on my appearance. My regret at recollecting that I was treading for the last time the boards where I had so often received the most gratifying testimonies of public approbation; where mental exertion had been emboldened by private worth; that I was flying from a happy certainty, perhaps to pursue the phantom Disappointment, nearly overwhelmed my faculties, and for some time deprived me of the power of articulation. Fortunately, the persons on the stage



In vain the management offered her a re-engagement upon increased terms. The actress had abandoned her profession—*pour cause*.

On the 3rd December, 1779, the "Winter's Tale" had been performed by royal command. Mr. Smith, the *Leontes* of the night, had been complimenting the *Perdita* upon her good looks. "By Jove, Mrs. Robinson," cried the actor, laughing, "you will make a conquest of the prince to-night, for you look handsomer than ever." The prince was in his eighteenth year, and quite willing to be conquered by pretty Mrs. Robinson. He followed her performance with marked attention; applauding frequently, and expressing his gratification in tones loud enough to reach her ear. At the conclusion of the play he bowed to her so particularly as to bring (so the lady protests) blushes of gratitude into her cheeks. On the following morning Lord Malden brings the prince's thanks to the actress for her exertions, in a billet signed—FLORIZEL.

The admiration of the heir-apparent for Mrs. Robinson is soon town-talk. The royal family attend a performance of music at the Pantheon, at which the actress is also present. The prince avails himself of the opportunity to demonstrate the state of his feelings.

with me had to begin the scene, which allowed me time to collect myself. I went, however, mechanically dull through the business of the evening, and, notwithstanding the cheering expressions and applause of the audience, I was several times near fainting."

He bows, makes signs, and drinks a glass of water, first glancing in a particular way at the actress, as though he were "toasting" her. A newspaper even comments upon the matter, observing that one passage in the performance of Dryden's "Ode" seemed peculiarly interesting to the Prince of Wales.

"The prince, unable to conceal his pain,  
Gazed on the fair  
Who caused his care,  
And sighed and looked, sighed and looked,  
Sighed and looked, and sighed again."\*

Then the prince puts his sighs into words, and sends to the lady daily letters, of which Lord Malden is the bearer. Mrs. Robinson finds in the royal epistles "a beautiful

\* Mrs. Robinson's account has been followed. She describes the scene at the oratorio as taking place *within a few days* of the performance of the "Winter's Tale." By an extract from a newspaper of the 12th February, 1780, however, the occasion would seem to have been some nine weeks later. The lady is somewhat severely dealt with. "A circumstance of rather an embarrassing nature happened at *last night's* oratorio. Mrs. R——, decked out in all her finery, took care to post herself in one of the upper boxes, immediately opposite the prince's, and by those airs peculiar to herself contrived at last so to *basilisk* a certain heir-apparent, that his fixed attention to the beautiful object above became generally noticed, and soon after astonished their Majesties, who, not being able to discover the cause, seemed at a loss to account for the extraordinary effect. No sooner, however, were they properly informed than a messenger was instantly sent aloft desiring the dart-dealing actress to withdraw, which she complied with, though not without expressing the utmost chagrin at her mortifying removal."

ingenuousness," "a warm and enthusiastic admiration which interested and charmed." Then the lover begs her acceptance of his portrait in miniature, painted by Mr. Meyer. Within the case of the picture was a small heart cut in paper with "Je ne change qu'en mourant," written on one side, and on the other "Unalterable to my Perdita through life."

After months of correspondence an interview becomes inevitable. The prince is urgent; the lady deliberates; and deliberation in such a case is proverbially a dangerous symptom. Just at this time, too, the husband becomes more and more conveniently perfidious, reckless of his wife's good opinion, deeply in debt, graspingly eager for her salary, and clutching the proceeds of her benefits to pacify the most persistent of his creditors. The wife has begun to care a good deal for the prince—has ceased to care at all for her husband—who, indeed, seems now to drop out of the story altogether, content to connive at his own dishonour—well satisfied with the price it has fetched. But the meeting is not easy to arrange. The prince is under strict control, his movements are jealously watched, he is surrounded by careful tutors and guardians, pastors and masters. A proposition that the lady shall be stealthily introduced in male attire to the prince's apartments in Buckingham House she decidedly declines. It is then proposed that an interview shall take

place at Lord Malden's house in Dean Street, May Fair. But this plan fails, owing to the rigid guardianship to which the lover is subjected. Finally, it is arranged that the prince shall meet the actress in the evening, for a few moments only, on the banks of the Thames at Kew, opposite to the old palace, the summer residence of the elder princes.

Perdita dines with Lord Malden on the island between Kew and Brentford. A handkerchief is waved as a signal, which the darkness of the night renders almost imperceptible. The lady steps into a boat, and is landed in front of the iron gates of the palace. The prince and the Duke of York (then Bishop of Osnaburgh) are walking down the avenue, and immediately hasten up. The first interview is very brief, but it is followed by others of longer duration. Extreme caution is observed; the party wear dark-coloured clothes, with the exception of the Duke of York, who excites alarm, and seems to invite attention by thoughtlessly appearing in a *buff* coat,—rather too conspicuous a hue for a midnight adventure. But the lovers wax bolder as time goes on. The meetings are prolonged. The prince sings “with exquisite taste, and the tones of his voice breaking on the silence of the night appeared to my entranced senses like more than mortal melody”—so the lady describes the musical efforts of the royal lover.

It had been resolved that the loves of Florizel and

Perdita should be maintained a strict secret until the prince was emancipated from parental control and provided with an establishment of his own. But the secret was not well kept—was soon no secret at all. The lovers were not discreet; still less were their friends; least of all their enemies. The loves of Florizel and Perdita speedily became town-talk—common property. The newspapers, of course, made their profit out of the scandal, treating the public to choice little paragraphs—edifying and appetizing—concerning “a R-y-l p-rs-n-ge” and “a certain actress.” Crowds followed the lady wherever she went; her carriage was fairly mobbed by curious gazers; she could scarcely appear in public for the pressure round her. Everybody was stirred with anxiety to look upon the Circe who had beguiled the future king. And the general judgment was not favourable to Perdita. That in such a case a young and handsome prince—a nation’s hope and pride—should be faulty, was a thing for smiles and forgiveness. But that an actress should be frail was unpardonable—merited the strictest reprobation. Propriety brought her most awful frowns to bear upon the subject.

Of course the king was very angry—deeply grieved. There had already been some estrangement between father and son,—this grew to a breach, open and avowed, widening and widening. George III. had deluded himself with the idea that his heir could not go astray,

because he had been brought up in such rigorous seclusion—could not be extravagant, because his allowance had been so meagre. (The office of treasurer in the prince's household had been made, on this account, the subject of many pleasantries.) The father's strictness had simply taught the son to dissimulate and to get into debt, while it had effectually banished all confidence and sympathy between them.

At the end of 1780 the prince was free, with a separate establishment, and an allowance out of the national purse. He appeared at court on the queen's birthday in his new character of manhood. His costume was possibly chosen expressly to show that he had begun to think for himself. He wore, we are told, "a coat of pink silk with white cuffs; his waistcoat was of white silk embroidered with various-coloured foil, but adorned with a profusion of French paste; and his hat was ornamented with two rows of steel beads, 5000 in number, with a button and loop of the same metal, and cocked in a new military style." What Teufelsdröckh calls "the Divine Idea of Cloth" developed itself early and thoroughly in George, Prince of Wales.

The prince went at once into active opposition to his father and the government of the day. He became the constant associate and intimate friend of Fox and Sheridan. The fashionable vices and dissipations which were the *délassements* of the Whigs, he made the business

and sole object of his life. He was as yet restrained from appearing "on the turf;" but he indulged without limit in dresses, equipages, *fêtes*, private plays, and galantries. In one year his wardrobe alone was said to have cost £10,000. His passion for Mrs. Robinson was everywhere paraded in the most public manner. He was seen at her side at masquerades, balls, the opera, the theatres; even at the royal hunts in Windsor Forest, and the reviews in the presence of the king. She appeared daily in Pall Mall, St. James's Street, and the parks,—now in a fashionable high phaeton, now in an exquisite *vis-à-vis* carriage, the prince's gift (at a cost of 900 guineas), bearing upon its panels the lady's cipher, and a basket of flowers so arranged as at a little distance to look like a five-pearled coronet. She varied her costume with tasteful but expensive adroitness. "To-day," writes Miss Hawkins, "she was a *paysanne*, with her straw hat tied at the back of her head. . . . Yesterday she perhaps had been the dressed *belle* of Hyde Park, trimmed, powdered, patched, painted to the utmost power of rouge and white lead; to-morrow she would be the cravated Amazon of the riding-house; but be she what she might, the hats of the fashionable promenaders swept the ground as she passed." The prince's favourite had reached her apogee. It was very splendid shame—while it lasted.

She had to endure mortifications, of course. That

madcap engraver and painter, Jack Sherwin, was at this time at work upon his strange picture, which he subsequently engraved, of the "Finding of Moses." In this were to be introduced all the most celebrated beauties of the day. The Princess Royal sat for Pharaoh's daughter; the lovely Duchess of Devonshire and her sister Lady Duncannon, the Duchess of Rutland, the Ladies Jersey, the Ladies Waldegrave and others, appeared as her attendants—a curious, absurd, incongruous work; graceful and pretty, nevertheless. The engraving is still extant. The ladies wear the powder and jewels, feathers and lace, of George III.'s court. They look rather as though they were figures cut out of old-fashion books—not in the least like characters in biblical history. Yet the picture created a great sensation. There was quite a struggle among the women of quality to have their titles as beauties registered, as it were, by their presentment in Mr. Sherwin's picture. Poor Perdita put forward her claim—to be denied, however, and rebuked for her presumption. Something more than beauty was required to secure a place among the princess's attendants: a good name was also needed. And Perdita was without virtue, or the semblance of it.

She was a constant visitor at the painter's studio, however, possibly in the hope that the thoughtless fellow might, at the last moment, yield to her prayers. But, for a wonder—discretion was by no means his *forte*—he



remained firm. Then she decided upon being portrayed by Mr. Sherwin upon a separate canvas. She would be painted as Abra at the feet of Solomon. There was no doubt as to whom she intended Mr. Sherwin to represent in the character of Solomon. But the artist thought the project a little too hazardous. He declined to further it. But he made a clever impromptu portrait of the lady, engraving it at once upon the copper in his own wonderfully facile manner, without any previous drawing. Already a rumour went about that the love of Florizel for Perdita had considerably cooled—that the favourite's glory was on the wane.

Indeed, the royal passion was hardly less impulsive in its ending than in its beginning—was as short-lived as it was impetuous. The final separation of the lovers took place early in 1781. George III. wrote to Lord North on the 20th August in that year :—

“My eldest son got last year into an improper connection with an actress and woman of indifferent character through the friendly assistance of Lord Malden. He sent her letters and very foolish promises, which undoubtedly by her conduct she has cancelled. Colonel Hotham has settled to pay the enormous sum of £5000 for the letters, etc., being returned. You will, therefore, settle with him.”

Florizel at the commencement of his courtship had sent Perdita his written promise to pay to her, on his

coming of age, the sum of £20,000. This document was duly signed by the prince, and sealed with the royal arms. When she wrote, after their separation, reminding her lover of this promise, and applying for some assistance under the pecuniary difficulties which then beset her, she could obtain no answer to her letter. Persisting in her appeal for aid, the matter was submitted to the arbitrament of Mr. Fox; and the lady's claims were at length satisfied by the grant of an annuity of £500, one moiety of which at her decease was to descend to her daughter for life. This was to be regarded as a consideration for Mrs. Robinson's "resignation of a lucrative profession at the particular request of His Royal Highness."

Little reason was assigned for the prince's abrupt abandonment of his idol. One day he is overwhelming her with protestations of eternal devotion; on the next he meets his Perdita in Hyde Park, and turns his head to avoid seeing her—even affects not to know her. The prince was very young to be so heartless. Satiety had much to do with this, probably. Doubtless, too, poor Perdita had enemies very ready to whisper calumnies concerning her into her lover's ears. Yet during her last interview with the prince, prior to their separation, neither perhaps knowing it to be the last, while he admitted that she had many concealed enemies who were resolved upon her ruin, he assured her again and again

that his love for her had never ceased—could never cease.

It has been unavoidable that we should follow to a great extent the lady's account of this scandalous business; and her narrative, while it shrinks from bringing any direct accusation against the prince, is yet adroitly shaped with a view to finding in his misdeeds an excuse for her own frailty. In judging Florizel, however, it must be borne in mind that modern standards of morality are hardly applicable to the case. The tone of society in the days of George, Prince of Wales, was debased enough. True, the court set an example of extreme propriety; but then a pure court was in itself an innovation concerning the value of which the world had not yet made up its mind. The quaker kind of life of George III. and his queen was not imitated with any very great avidity. It demanded almost too great a change in settled habits and customs. So profligacy still flourished, hardly deeming it worth while to wear ever so slight a mask; vice continued in fashion; dissipation and debauchery were yet *de rigueur*. The prince's transgressions were judged leniently. Certainly, too, in the instance under mention, he had the plea of youth on his side. He was yet a minor, and by some four years the junior of Perdita. And moreover, in those times, where a prince wooed he was pretty sure to win. They were no such very unwilling victims that were sacrificed

upon the altar of royal love. More, perhaps, might be urged in the way of apology for Florizel, and without pressing too severely upon Perdita, but that the after life of the prince furnished such frequent instances of similar wrong-doing : but that such glaring evidence is on record as to the alacrity with which he consoled himself for the loss of his love, bowed before other idols, secured fresh victims. Turn for a moment to the parish register of St. Marylebone. You will find the entry of the baptism of a child : "Georgiana Augusta Frederica Elliott, daughter of H.R.H. George, Prince of Wales, and Grace Elliott,\* born 30th March, and baptized 30th July, 1782." And it was in 1780 that the prince began to importune Mrs. Fitzherbert with his passionate addresses !

Mrs. Robinson's "retiring pension" was not very princely in amount, when it is considered that, had the lady continued on the stage, she would probably have been in receipt of a far larger income. She was young, she had secured the favour of the public, and might fairly have counted upon many years of professional exertion. Still, the allowance would doubtless have been sufficient, but that poor Perdita was deeply in debt. Florizel had accustomed her to a system of profuse ex-

\* This was the Mrs. Grace Dalrymple Elliott, the journal of whose life during the French Revolution was first given to the world in 1859.

penditure—she had been living a life of extravagant luxury—it was difficult to become prudent and thrifty all of a sudden. And she had, it seemed, to maintain her husband, her mother, and her child. Moreover, the interval between the withdrawal of all aid from the prince, and the settlement upon her of a regular income, had greatly increased the embarrassment of her position. At one time she meditated a return to the stage; but, assured that an indignant public would rise against her upon her reappearance, she reluctantly abandoned the idea. Her debts now amounted to something like £7000, and her creditors assailed her angrily on all sides. “A favourite has no friends,” says Gay.

Suddenly she quitted England on a visit to Paris. She found no lack of friends and admirers, English and foreign—not of the most honest kind, though—in the French capital. Her story had preceded her—she was received with a curious kind of effusion. The Duke of Orleans posed himself as the most devoted of her adorers. Queen Marie Antoinette dines in public for the first time after the birth of the Duke of Burgundy, afterwards the Dauphin, and the Duke of Orleans brings a message that her Majesty has expressed a desire that “la belle Anglaise” will appear at the ceremony. Accordingly, in a train and body of pale green lutestring, with a tiffany petticoat festooned with lilac, a plume of white feathers on her head, and her cheeks deeply

rouged, to conform precisely to the fashion of the French court, Mrs. Robinson presents herself at the *grand couvert*. But a small space separates the queen and the ex-royal favourite. The two ladies admire each other exceedingly. The queen even commissions the Duke of Orleans to borrow the portrait of the Prince of Wales, which Mrs. Robinson wears on the bosom of her dress. The miniature is returned on the following day, with a purse, netted by the hand of Marie Antoinette, a present to the English beauty. Unhappy queen!—these and other indiscretions supplied her foes with a sort of warrant for the grossness of their subsequent accusations. A few years later she was paying dire penalties for her thoughtlessness.

In 1784, poor Perdita was attacked by a most distressing malady, from the effects of which, indeed, she never recovered. Exposure during a night journey in a post-chaise \* with the windows open brought on a fever, which confined her to her bed for six months: acute rheumatism followed, and deprived her of the use of her limbs. She was prescribed the warm baths of Aix-la-Chapelle; with little result, however. For the remainder

\* This journey, it is said, was undertaken on behalf of the lady's *friend*, Colonel Tarleton, at a time when that officer was in great pecuniary straits. Colonel Tarleton had distinguished himself by the daring and fierceness, the cruelty even, of his services under Lord Cornwallis, in America. During sixteen years an attachment subsisted between Colonel Tarleton and Mrs. Robinson.

of her life she was a helpless cripple, unable to move without assistance. Miss Hawkins, in her volumes of *Memoirs*, has some notes concerning the unfortunate lady. One evening, seated on a table in one of the waiting-rooms of the Opera House, there was to be seen a woman of fashionable appearance, still beautiful, though her beauty was fading fast. A glance of pity fell upon her now and then; otherwise she received little attention. "In a few minutes two liveried servants came to her, they took from their pockets long white sleeves which they drew on their arms; they then lifted her up and conveyed her to her carriage; it was the then helpless paralytic Perdita."

"She had become literary," Miss Hawkins records, "brought up her daughter literary, and expressed, without qualification, her rage when her works were not urged forward beyond all others." Indeed, the poor lady was in great difficulties. Her wants were urgent. She turned to the booksellers, who received her with business-like cordiality. She had from childhood been fond of dabbling in verse—could always produce stanzas to *this* or *that* at the shortest of notices. In the winter of 1790 she had entered into a poetical correspondence with Mr. Robert Merry, the Della Cruscan poetaster, signing "Laura" and "Laura Maria" to her namby-pamby versicles, which, however, were no doubt as valuable as those she received in return. Several ladies

of the Blue-Stocking Club had expressed their admiration of Mrs. Robinson's poetic efforts. She now published her romance of "Vancenza," in two volumes, which ran through six editions. This success, however, was due much more to public curiosity concerning the writer than to any respect for her writings, which, indeed, were of no great intrinsic worth. But so long as morbid inquisitiveness produced purchasers, the lady was well content to publish. It was money she wanted—good repute was a very secondary matter. After "Vancenza" came "The Widow," a novel; "Reflections on the Situation of the Queen of France," a pamphlet written in 1790; "Solitude," a poem; "The Cavern of Woe," a poem; "*Ainsi va le Monde*," a poem; "The Sicilian Lover," a tragedy (never acted); "Angelina," a novel in three vols.; "Hubert de Savarre," four vols.; "Walsingham," four vols.; "Thoughts on the Condition of Women, and the Injustice of Mental Subordination," a pamphlet; "The False Friend," a novel, four vols.; "The Natural Daughter," two vols.; not to mention numberless short pieces in prose and verse. The poor woman was certainly industrious enough. She even for some time, by desire of its editor, provided the *Morning Post* with verse, and commenced in the columns of that journal a series of satirical odes on topics of the day, signing her productions "Tabitha Bramble."

On the 29th November, 1794, was produced at



Drury Lane Theatre a farce called "Nobody," written by Mrs. Robinson, the chief characters being sustained by John Bannister, Bensley, Barrymore, Mrs. Jordan,\* Miss Pope, and Miss De Camp. The piece was designed as a satire upon female gamesters; its literary merits were probably slight enough. It seems, however, to have been subjected to rather ill-natured treatment. A leading actress (probably Miss Farren) threw up her part, alleging that the play was intended to ridicule one of her particular friends. Anonymous letters were sent to other of the performers, conveying a warning that "'Nobody' should surely be damned," and the author was informed that the piece would certainly be driven from the stage. On the drawing up of the curtain several persons in the gallery, being servants in livery, openly declared that they were sent to "do up 'Nobody.'" Women of rank in the boxes were heard to hiss "through their fans." An impartial pit, however, asserted itself, and demanded that the performance should not be prejudged, but suffered to proceed. The first act was accordingly gone through without much interruption, but an attempt to encore a song in the second act brought on very active opposition, the pent-

\* "I remember the warmth with which she (Mrs. Robinson) chanted the kindness of Mrs. Jordan in accepting the principal character; and I cannot forget the way, when the storm began, in which the actress, frightened out of her senses, 'died and made no sign.'"—Boaden's "Life of Kemble."

up clamour broke out all the more violently for its temporary suppression, and the play was brought to a close amidst great confusion. Attempts were made to repeat "Nobody" on two subsequent occasions, but the hostility seemed rather to increase than diminish; the theatre became the scene of serious disturbances, and finally, Mrs. Robinson withdrew the cause of contention. The piece was never revived, and poor Perdita made no further attempt to gain fame as a writer for the stage.

In private, however, she was able to maintain a certain reputation in respect of her literary achievements. It would be testing these too severely to judge them by modern standards. Undoubtedly she possessed a facility in manufacturing verses, if not very original or highly imaginative, still not without a certain grace and feeling. For her novels, if they are no better, they are clearly no worse than the majority of the novels of her time. They were in large demand at the libraries. Probably her ambition aimed no higher than at success of that kind. They had their day and died; that they will never be disinterred and revived, it is very safe to predicate. It is but very, very few works of their class of literature that can endure the wear and tear of three generations and still exist. Nevertheless, her merits as a writer were sufficient for her day. The sofa in her small drawing-room in St. James's Place was constantly sur-

rounded by a small throng of faithful and sympathetic admirers. To the last she retained traces of her once singular beauty, was always graceful and intelligent, delighted to be informed (we learn on the authority of Mr. Boaden, the biographer of the Kembles) of all that passed in the world, mingling in the conversation her full share of intelligence, and disdaining to exhibit any evidence of the pain she was often actually suffering at the moment. "So that at the jest of others, and sometimes during her own repartee, the countenance preserved its pleasant expression, while a cold dew was glistening upon her forehead." Her industry, considering the pain she endured, and the reclining attitude to which she was condemned, was certainly remarkable. The suffering and mortification of her declining life seem to have been accepted on all hands as a sort of expiation of her early errors. A general understanding prevailed, that in pity for the present a veil was to be thrown over the misdeeds of the past. The Prince of Wales even appeared sometimes in the house in St. James's Place, no longer to admire the beauty, or to adore the woman,—Florizel had found other objects of devotion—but to pay homage to the poetess, and to try and amuse the invalid. Sheridan came too, though the lady had ceased to consider him a friend, attributing to him a share in the first diversion from her of the prince's affection; and Burke, and Sir Joshua, up to within a

short time before his death, the Duke of York, Wilkes, Henderson the actor, Sir John Elliott, and others. Mrs. Siddons writes to her friend Mr. Taylor (author of "Monsieur Tonson") :—"I am very much obliged to Mrs. Robinson for her polite attention in sending me her poems. Pray tell her so, with my compliments. I hope the poor charming woman has quite recovered from her fall. If she is half as amiable as her writings, I shall long for the *possibility* of being acquainted with her. I say the *possibility*, because one's whole life is one continual sacrifice of inclinations, which, to indulge, however laudable or innocent, would draw down the malice and reproach of those prudent people who never do ill, 'but feed and sleep, and do observances to the stale ritual of quaint ceremony.' The charming and beautiful Mrs. Robinson: I pity her from the bottom of my soul." And even less generous-hearted persons than Sarah Siddons found in the case of poor Perdita something well worthy of their commiseration.

Early in the spring of 1800, it became evident that poor Perdita's health was giving way rapidly. She was compelled to relinquish almost altogether her literary occupations. Her strength had left her, and symptoms of consumption appeared. She was advised a journey to Bristol wells; the doctors announced their last hope that her native air might possibly benefit the sufferer. But poor Perdita was without the necessary means for

the journey. Her annuity was absorbed in the payment of her debts, and when her writing ceased, the chief means of her support came to an end likewise. She quitted London and repaired to a small cottage near Windsor. In the pure air and perfect quiet she rallied a little, began to work again; even attempted to maintain a supply of articles for a daily newspaper, struggling hard to keep the wolf from the door. She lingered to the end of the year, utterly prostrate and suffering acutely from dropsy on the chest, breathing her last on Christmas-day, 1800. She was buried in Old Windsor churchyard.

The Memoirs of Mrs. Robinson, published the year after her death, purport to be written partly by herself, and partly by her daughter. The narrative of her life is alleged to have been given to the world in pursuance of her death-bed injunctions. The book has much of the romancist's tone about it, the facts it deals with are palpably decorated and disposed with an eye to effect; it is, of course, apologetic and exculpatory in character, and is oftentimes conveniently fragmentary.

## CHAPTER IV.

## "SIR PETER TEAZLE."

WHEN, on May 24, 1802, Mr. Thomas King, the comedian, in the seventy-third year of his age, appeared for the last time as *Sir Peter Teazle*, and took leave of the stage, his brother players presented him with a handsome silver cup inscribed with their names and with the appropriate lines from Shakespeare's "Henry V.:" "If he be not fellow with the best king, thou shalt find him the best king of good fellows." Mrs. Jordan, the *Lady Teazle* of the night, had led the veteran from the stage to a seat in the green-room. Mr. Dowton, who had played Sir Oliver, then, in the name of the Drury Lane company and the profession, presented the cup to Mr. King, inviting him to a cheerful draught from it, and begging him to accept it as a token of affectionate regard, and in memory of his merits as an actor and of his kindly conduct to all during the many years he had gratified the public before the curtain and endeared himself to the players behind it. The old man

endeavoured to express his thanks in appropriate language—he was much affected by the kindness of his friends and comrades.

The farewell nights of the players are usually trying and touching occasions. For no less than fifty-four years Mr. King had filled an important position upon the London stage. It was hard for him to terminate of his own accord a career that had brought him great fame—that had conferred so much pleasure upon so many. He was the patriarch of his profession. Generations had passed through the playhouse, leaving him still an admired occupant of its boards. The playgoers who had been children when he first appeared were now old men; while those, alas! who were old when, a stripling of eighteen, he commenced his engagement at Drury Lane, had long since vanished into the grave. But King had been loth to depart. It was not only that his circumstances were not of a very flourishing sort—thanks in great part to his own extravagance, his foolish compliance with the gambling fashions of his time—but his art was dear to him. He loved nothing better than the exercise of his gifts and acquirements before an appreciative audience. The time had really come for him, however, to make his final exit from the scene. He had lately been a good deal distressed by failure of memory; he could scarcely learn new parts. “He needed,” we are told, “a very painful tensity of care to

keep even his old studies in tolerable condition." Ten years before he left the stage, in 1792, the satirical poem, "The Children of Thespis," had reminded him cruelly and coarsely enough of his age and his decline. He is told that he had "incompetent grown," that he is "but the mere ghost" of what he was :—

"For envious of worth, see! to sever the thread,  
Foul Atropos plays round his reverend head.  
And 'tis plain both his mind and his faculties moulder  
When the task of each day proves the man—a day older."

And further—

"His characters fade as his spirits decay,  
And his *Brass* is at best—an attempt to be gay."

Yet it was of his *Brass*, a character in the "Confederacy" of Sir John Vanbrugh, that Churchill had written, in 1761, in the "Rosciad" :—

"'Mongst Drury's sons he comes and shines in Brass."

However, Boaden, who was present in the pit, relates that King, appearing for the last time as *Sir Peter Teazle*, played "extremely well, and in the language was quite perfect." He had, it seems, a habit of repeating, inaudibly, every speech addressed him by the other characters, "so that he never remitted his attention to the business for a moment; his lips were always employed, and he was probably master of the language of every scene he was engaged in." It is admitted, however, that his face, which was at all times very strongly



marked, and was "flexible to many changes of expression," bore "rather too evident signs of the ravages of time." Cumberland supplied the actor with a poetic address containing the lines :—

"Patrons, farewell :

Though you still kindly my defects would spare,  
Constant indulgence who would wish to bear?  
Who that retains the scenes of brighter days  
Can sue for pardon while he pants for praise?  
On well-earned fame the mind with pride reflects,  
But pity sinks the man whom it protects.

The fate that none can fly from I invite,  
And do my own dramatic death this night.

That chance has come to me that comes to all—  
My drama's done. I let the curtain fall."

The verses are not the happiest example of Cumberland's muse. But Cumberland was himself at this time a septuagenarian.

Charles Kemble, who had played *Charles Surface*, now, "with the graceful attention of Orlando to the old Adam of 'As You Like it,'" attended *Sir Peter Teazle* while he spoke his parting address, in order to prompt him if, in his agitation, Mr. King might be at a loss for Cumberland's words. Boaden, somewhat morbidly curious "to see how the great comedian struggled with his feelings," watched him closely. "His eye showed but little, but his lip trembled and his voice faltered"—naturally enough. The audience were much affected as

they listened intently to the voice they were never to hear again upon the stage. The address concluded, Mr. King withdrew, "amid the tears and plaudits of a most splendid and crowded house." He survived some two years only, and lies interred in the churchyard of St. Paul's, Covent Garden, the burial-place of the actors Estcourt, Kynaston, Wilks, Macklin, and others, and of the dramatists Wycherley and Susannah Centlivre. Portraits of King, by John Wilson, the landscape painter, and as *Touchstone*, by Zoffany, are possessed by the Garrick Club. Hazlitt writes: "His acting left a taste on the palate, sharp and sweet, like a quince. With an old, hard, rough, withered face, like a sour apple, puckered up into a thousand wrinkles; with shrewd hints and tart replies; with nods and becks and wreathed smiles; he was the real, amorous, wheedling, or hasty, choleric, peremptory old gentleman in *Sir Peter Teazle* and *Sir Anthony Absolute*; and the true, that is, the pretended clown in *Touchstone*, with wit sprouting from his head like a pair of ass's ears, and folly perched on his cap like the horned owl." King left a widow. He had married, about 1766, a Miss Baker, a dancer engaged at Drury Lane. Her means were but scanty in her old age. She became the tenant of a garret in Tottenham Court Road, and was supported chiefly by the contributions of her friends. We are told, however, that she bore her reverse of fortune with exemplary patience and submission.

In regard to the parentage and youth of King accounts vary. One biographer relates that he was born in August, 1730, in the parish of St. George, Hanover Square, descended by the father's side from a respectable family in Hampshire and by the mother's side "from the Blisses of Gloucestershire." Another writer insists that he was born in Westminster, the son of a decent tradesman. He was educated either at Westminster School or at a minor establishment that prepared pupils for Westminster School. He was articled to an attorney, but he quitted the law for the stage. With Shuter, the comedian, he joined a troop of strolling players, and, at the age of seventeen, made his first appearance in a barn at Tunbridge. For a twelvemonth King led an itinerant life, studying and performing tragedy, comedy, farce, pastoral and pantomime, with great industry and small profit. "I remember," he was wont to relate in after life, "that when I had been but a short time on the stage I performed one night *King Richard*, sang two comic songs, played in an interlude, danced a hornpipe, spoke a prologue, and was afterwards harlequin in a sharing company, and after all this fatigue my share came to three-pence and three pieces of candle!" A biographer adds that he had, further, journeyed from Beaconsfield to London and back again in order that he might obtain certain "properties" essential, as he considered, to his appearance as *King Richard*.

An introduction to Yates, the comedian—then about to open a booth for theatrical exhibitions at Windsor—secured young King an engagement. This was the commencement of his good fortune as an actor. His merits were favourably reported to Garrick, who repaired to Windsor, heard the young man rehearse, and forthwith engaged him for two seasons. He made his first appearance at Drury Lane on the 19th October, 1748, performing *Allworth* in "A New Way to pay Old Debts." The character was well suited to his youthful appearance, and he obtained considerable applause. He appeared subsequently as *George Barnwell*, as *Ferdinand* in the "Tempest," as *Claudio* in "Much Ado about Nothing," as *Young Fashion* in "The Relapse," as *Dolabella* in "All for Love," and as the *Fine Gentleman* in the farce of "Lethe;" but he was also required to undertake such minor characters as the *Herald* in "King Lear," *Salanio* in "The Merchant of Venice," and *Rosse* in "Macbeth." Altogether he seems to have been somewhat dissatisfied with his occupation in the theatre; he desired more comic parts than it was convenient to Mr. Garrick to entrust him with. His engagement terminated, he repaired to Dublin, where he remained nine years enjoying the most cordial favour of his audiences. He made his first appearance at Mr. Sheridan's theatre in Capel Street, as *Ranger* in the comedy of "The Suspicious Husband." "Though a very young man," writes the historian of the

Irish stage, "Mr. Thomas King was allowed to possess an extraordinary share of merit, and deemed a valuable acquisition. He was highly approved of by the town, and remained several years in Ireland, improving every day in his profession and the esteem of the public. His many virtues in private, joined to his abilities on the stage, deservedly gained him the esteem and friendship of those who were so fortunate as to be intimate with him."

King now seems to have eschewed tragedy altogether. Originally cast for the lovers and even the "walking gentlemen" of the drama, he was gradually assigned more and more of what the actors call the "character parts," and particularly distinguished himself as the saucy serving-men and the quaintly choleric elderly gentlemen of old-fashioned English comedy. He was very versatile; his experiences as a stroller were of rare service to him. Among his more famous impersonations during his stay in Ireland may be counted his *Mercutio* and *Sir Andrew Aguecheek*, his *Osric* and *Autolycus*, his *Scrub*, *Abel Drugger*, *Marplot*, *Tattle*, *Duretête* in "The Inconstant," and *Love-gold* in "The Miser." He obtained great applause also by appearing as a speaking harlequin. He is described as possessing a most easy and genteel figure, with a pleasing countenance, greatly expressive features, "spirited and significant eyes," distinct voice, and ingenious and appropriate action. His face and manner were

said to be remarkable for "a pert vivacity, with a sly knowledge of the world," peculiarly his own. When the part he played so required, he could deliver his speeches with extraordinary rapidity, yet with such distinct articulation that not a syllable was lost. He was considered to be particularly happy as the speaker of a prologue or epilogue. "There was a happy distinction in his ease, manner, familiarity, and acting these dramatic addresses that rendered these entertainments of the first class, and of this the audiences were so sensible that they would never suffer the farce of 'Bon Ton' to be presented without the prologue."

From 1759 dates his long engagement at Drury Lane Theatre, which may be said to have terminated only with his professional career. For a season, however, he was absent, and his services were transferred to Covent Garden. He had become nominally stage-manager under Sheridan, but the position was one of considerable discomfort. In an address to the public, published in 1788, he explains his conduct in withdrawing from an office which simply constituted him the scapegoat of the lessee. Sheridan either could not or would not manage the theatre himself; nor would he formally delegate authority to another. King had enjoyed but the shadow of power while generally credited with complete responsibility. He complained with reason of the undefined nature of his duties, which involved him in endless discussions and

difficulties with authors, actors, and the public. "Should any one ask me what was my post at Drury Lane, and if I was not manager, who was? I should be forced to answer, like my friend Atall in the comedy, to the first, *I don't know*; and to the last, *I can't tell*. I can only once more positively assert that I was *not manager*; for I had not the power by my agreement, nor had I indeed the wish, to approve or reject any new dramatic work; the liberty of engaging, encouraging, or discharging any one performer; nor sufficient authority to command the cleaning a coat or adding, by way of decoration, a yard of copper lace—both of which, it must be allowed, were often much wanted." The appointment King vacated was presently filled by Kemble. In the following season King returned to the theatre, as an actor only, without share or pretence of a share in the management. Kemble had now to endure the sufferings King had experienced as the stage-manager of the incorrigible Sheridan. After some seasons, Kemble followed King's example, and retired in his turn from the cares of so thankless an office.

King's repertory was most extensive, but many of the characters he impersonated pertain to plays that have long since been forgotten. Comedies are rarely so long-lived as tragedies; a pathetic fable may endure for all time, but the comic story is often of very evanescent quality, is dependent upon such varying, fleeting matters

as fashion, tastes, and manners. Among King's Shakespearian parts, in addition to those already mentioned, may be counted *Petruchio*, *Stephano*, *Touchstone*, *Parolles*, *Speed*, *Malvolio*, *Cloten*, the clown in the "Winter's Tale," *Pistol*, *Roderigo*, *Falstaff*, and the *First Gravedigger*. On certain benefit nights he appeared now as *Shylock*, now as *Richard III.*, now as *Iago*; upon a particular occasion he undertook the three characters of *Shift*, *Smirk*, and *Mother Cole* in "The Minor." He was the original representative of *Sir Peter Teazle*, of *Puff*, of *Dr. Cantwell* in "The Hypocrite," and *Lord Ogleby* in "The Clandestine Marriage." On the death of his old fellow-stroller, Shuter, who played *Sir Anthony Absolute* during the first season of the "The Rivals," the part was promptly taken possession of by King.

Upon his admirable performance of *Lord Ogleby* King's fame as an actor has been said more especially to rest. The comedy of "The Clandestine Marriage," written by Garrick and Colman, was first performed on the 20th February, 1766. The great success of the work led to a controversy as to which of the authors was responsible for the larger share of it. If there had been failure, each would probably have striven to show that he had been the smaller contributor. In truth, they seem to have divided the work pretty equally between them. The character of *Lord Ogleby* had been designed for Garrick, who had played, with success, a very similar



part, called *Lord Chalkstone*, in the farce of "Lethe." But Garrick was now much disinclined to attempt new characters, and, in spite of Colman's entreaty that he would play *Lord Ogleby*, and so secure the success of their comedy, he handed the part to King. As Tate Wilkinson relates, King again and again declined the character, although Garrick carefully read it over to him, and laid stress upon its points and general effectiveness. Finally, King took the part home with him to study, and began repeating passages of it in a tremulous voice, imitative of the tones of a certain Andrew Brice, an eccentric old printer of Exeter. "He tried repeatedly, and found that he had hit upon the very man as a natural and true picture to represent *Lord Ogleby*." He privately rehearsed a scene in this manner with Garrick, who exclaimed, "My dear King, if you can but sustain that fictitious manner and voice throughout it will be one of the greatest performances that ever adorned a British theatre." Wilkinson proceeds: "Mr. Garrick's prophecy was verified, as Mr. King's manner of producing that character before the public was then and is to this day one of the most capital and highly finished pieces of acting to which any audience ever was treated, and will never be forgotten while a trait of Mr. King can be remembered." From another account it may be gathered that Garrick's approval of King's *Lord Ogleby* was not altogether cordial; there seems, indeed, to have lurked

something of professional jealousy in the observation he made, long after his retirement from the stage, to his friend Cradock : "I know that you all take it as granted that no one can equal King in *Lord Ogleby*, and he certainly has great merit in the part ; but it is not *my Lord Ogleby*, and it is the only character in which I should now wish to appear."

Some few days after he had bidden farewell to the stage, Garrick sent to King, as a memento of him, a theatrical sword, with a friendly note : "Accept a small token of our long and constant attachment to each other. I flatter myself that the sword, as it is a theatrical one, will not cut love between us ; and that it will not be less valuable to you from having dangled by my side some part of the last winter. May health, success, and reputation still continue to attend you. *Farewell, remember me!*" King replies, lamenting the loss of a worthy patron and most affectionate friend, and the severe stroke inflicted, by Mr. Garrick's retirement, upon every performer in the theatre, and every admirer of the drama ; he adds, "Please to accept my warmest thanks for the token sent me, which I look on with pleasing pain—happy, however, in the reflection that my endeavours have not passed unnoticed by you to whom they were devoted, though conscious they have been very unequal to the favours repeatedly bestowed on, dear sir, your constant admirer, ardent well-wisher, and much

obliged humble servant, THOMAS KING." A postscript follows: "Accumulated blessings attend you and your family." Garrick endorses the letter: "Tom King's answer to my note, with my foil."

It must be admitted, however, that the long and constant attachment subsisting between manager and actor was now and then interrupted by the exchange of rather acrimonious communications. Garrick was fond of exhibiting his skill as a writer of sharp letters, and engaged in angry correspondence with every member of his company in turn. He was morbidly sensitive of anything said or done to his disparagement, was easily offended, could not overlook offence, was prone, indeed, to take it at every opportunity. Moreover, he was surrounded by sycophants, mischief-makers, tale-bearers, and tattlers. It seems that, in 1769, somebody, probably Mr. Hopkins, the prompter, had whispered to him that Mr. King had spoken lightly of his farce of "The Invasion." A note is forthwith despatched to Mr. King: "Mr. Garrick's compliments to Mr. King: though he is seldom surprised at what may happen in a theatre, yet he should be obliged to Mr. King if he would let him know, by a note, what he was pleased to say about him and the farce of 'The Invasion' to Mr. Hopkins. Mr. Garrick assures Mr. King that he will not send his answer to the prompter, but to himself." Mr. King replies with spirit: "I declare on my honour I do not

recollect that your name was mentioned, nor do I remember that there was anything particular said about the farce. . . . I shall only say, that it was out of my power, either on this or any other occasion, whenever your name could be mentioned, to treat it otherwise than with a warmth of respect little short of enthusiasm ; and I defy the world, replete as it is with rascals, to produce one base enough to contradict me." A post-script adds : "You were some time ago anxious lest your letters should fall into improper hands. I take the liberty to enclose the last for your perusal, and beg you will indulge me by burning it. Such a note found after my decease would go near to convince some friends, whose good opinion I covet, that I had most basely forfeited the favour of a man whose friendly attachment to me was for some time my greatest, nay, almost my only, boast." The note, however, was not destroyed ; it may be found preserved or entombed in the ponderous volumes containing the Garrick correspondence.

About three years later it is Mr. King's turn to complain of Mr. Garrick. "Why am I not to be paid as well as any other actor?" demanded King. "No actor is better received, yourself excepted. . . . I, without a murmur, begin at the opening of the theatre, if required, and never repine at playing, if called on, six nights in the week, till every doorkeeper is served, and the theatre shut up ; while those who are better, much better, allow

me to say shamefully better paid, never enter the lists till the theatre has been opened some time, are periodically sick or impertinent about the month of April, and in the very heat of the season are never expected to play two nights running. Some evasion is also found out by them when called on to play on a night immediately subsequent to your performing, their Majesties coming to the theatre, or, in short, anything that attracts the public so as to strengthen one night and weaken another." Garrick in reply demands, "Have you not, Mr. King, been conscious of some breaches of friendship to me, and are you not producing these allegations as excuses for your own behaviour? Have you not, instead of an open manly declaration of your thoughts to your friend, whispered about in hints and ambiguities your uneasiness? all which by circulation have partly crept into the newspapers; and though you have disclaimed being privy to their circulation, yet you have certainly been the first cause of it; while to me, even so lately as a fortnight ago, you came to my house at Hampton, showed no signs of displeasure, but rode with me to town, with all the cheerfulness of ease and in the warmest spirit of confidence. Was your friend to be the last to hear of your complaints or to suspect them? My complaints against you, not only as my friend but as a gentleman, are these: that you should keep a secret from me you have told to many; that you were the cause

of having our names mentioned in the daily papers." The fact seems to have been that King, dissatisfied with his position at Drury Lane, was disposed to listen to the advantageous offers he had received from the rival theatre. In addition to the question of salary, he feels aggrieved as to the manner of advertising him in the playbills; to make room for the lines devoted to another performer, he finds his name and the name of the character he represented "thrust so close under the title of the play that it required some attention to find them." As to his salary, he writes: "Were money my sole object, I should be glad, as Lord Foppington says, to take it in any way, 'stap my vitals;' but my wish was and is to be paid as much as any comedian on the stage, yourself excepted. If I cannot bring this about in my present agreement, I never can expect to do it; for should you return, and I want to make a fresh one, and enlarge my demand, the reply would naturally be, 'Why, Mr. Garrick, who was a competent judge of, and, as you have allowed, rather partial to, your abilities, would have given it to you if he had thought you had deserved it.' I do not believe the persons with whom I should then be in treaty would give me more for my plea of being then so many years older."

The salary question settled in King's favour, some difficulty seems to have arisen touching the revival at Drury Lane of Shakespeare's Jubilee, a pageant in which

the company, representing Shakespearian characters, walked in procession round the stage. This exhibition was not very favourably viewed by the actors, and some held aloof from it altogether. King maintained that the rule should be "all or none"—he was willing to appear with the rest—otherwise it became a question of professional dignity, and he declined accepting any share in the matter. "I cannot think of appearing in any procession where any member of the company thinks it a disgrace to make one." King, it may be noted, had taken part in the original Jubilee at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1769, appearing in a fashionable suit of blue and silver as a macaroni or buck of the period, and indulging in much comic and satiric abuse of Shakespeare, with a string of smart hits against the festival, the town, and Mr. Garrick, the high steward of the festival. This portion of the performance, apparently, was misunderstood by the audience, and considered by many as an impertinent interruption on the part of Mr. King. But the episode had been duly pre-arranged by Mr. Garrick, and King had but spoken what had been set down for him to speak.

It was the fashion to say that *Sir Peter Teazle* had quitted the stage with King; and no doubt the actor had completely identified himself with the character. But there have been excellent *Sir Peters* since King. And, indeed, as a rule, whenever an actor is said to take

away with him a famous part, there will usually be found some one to bring it back again to the stage—supposing it to be worth bringing back. That King afforded complete satisfaction to the playgoers of his time cannot be questioned, and the critics were unanimous in applauding the manner in which the comedy was represented by all concerned. Garrick was delighted ; he had attended the rehearsals, and had expressed the greatest anxiety for the success of the play. He has left on record certain remarks as to the length of time the characters stood still upon the stage after the fall of the screen. He notes that they should be astonished, a little petrified—"yet it may be carried to too great a length." It has been said, however, that Sheridan himself was never quite satisfied. Upon King's retirement the part of *Sir Peter* was entrusted to Wroughton, and subsequently to Mathews, with whose delineation Sheridan found considerable fault. He requested permission to read the part over to the actor, who found himself much embarrassed by this attention of his manager's. Sheridan's reading of the character differed so much from every other conception of it that Mathews found it impossible to adopt any of his suggestions, and followed, therefore, the manner of the original *Sir Peter*. "The pointing to the scene with the thumb, the leer, and the movements of the elbows, were precisely the same as practised by King." Sheridan, who had taken the part from Wrough-



ton, to give it to Mathews, now took it from Mathews and gave it back to Wroughton, and was still dissatisfied.

King's passion for gambling, acquired, it would appear, in the latter part of his life, involved him in pecuniary difficulty. He had been elected a member of Miles's clubhouse, and seems to have been plundered by his fashionable friends. A blackleg of quality, who was alleged to have been guilty of foul play in possessing himself of a large share of the actor's fortune, in dread of exposure and ignominious expulsion, removed his name from the books of all the clubs with which he had been connected. "This man," relates Mr. Taylor, "who was of good family, after his conduct towards King, was discarded by society, and used to wander alone through the streets, an object of contempt to all who had before known and respected him."

King, in his days of prosperity, had kept his carriage, tenanted a house in Great Queen Street and a villa at Hampton, in the neighbourhood of Garrick's country seat. He had enjoyed the honour of entertaining at Hampton Mrs. Siddons and her brother, John Kemble, during the Christmas holidays. "He was then easy in his circumstances, having a large salary, and, usually, a productive annual benefit." His society was generally courted; he was pronounced a very entertaining companion, abounding in wit and humour and whimsical anecdote. He was, in 1771, part proprietor and sole

manager of the Bristol Theatre, and at a later date he owned three-fourths of Sadler's Wells, which, we are told, he so extended and improved that it became a place of fashionable resort. His losses at play, however, compelled him to sever his connection with these properties. He was possessed of some literary skill, and is credited with the authorship of two farces: "*Love at First Sight*," produced at Drury Lane in 1763, and "*Wit's Last Stake*," an adaptation from the French of Regnard, performed several nights in succession in 1769. His friend, Mr. Taylor, writes of him: "If he had devoted himself as much to the muse as he did to the gaming-table, he might have added lustre to his character, have profited by his literary effusions, have ended his life in affluence, and his faithful and affectionate wife would have inherited the comfort of an elegant independence in some degree to console her for the loss of her husband." As his fortune declined, he seems to have quitted Hampton for Islington. At the period of his death he was the tenant of lodgings in Store Street, Bedford Square.

In his "*Dramatic Miscellanies*," Tom Davies, desiring to pay to "a worthy man and excellent actor" the just tribute due to his character, writes of Tom King: "As an honest servant to the proprietors, engaged in a variety of parts, no man ever exerted his abilities to the greater satisfaction of the public, or consulted the interest

of his employers with more cordiality and assiduity. As manager, entrusted to superintend, bring forward, and revive dramatic pieces, his judgment was solid and his attention unwearied. When he thought proper to quit his post of theatrical director, those of his own profession regretted the loss of a friend and companion whose humanity and candour they had experienced, and on whose impartiality and justice they knew they could firmly depend. Booth's character of the great actor Smith may be applied with justice to Mr. King: 'By his impartial management of the stage, and the affability of his temper, he merited the respect and esteem of all within the theatre, the applause of those without, and the good will and love of all mankind.' "

## CHAPTER V.

## "LADY TEAZLE."

A BRIGHT-EYED little flower-girl, to be seen in all weathers about the Mall of St. James's Park and known popularly as "Nosegay Fan"—that is almost the first character assumed upon the stage of life by a very famous actress. Her father, a private soldier in the King's Guards, but retired from service to a cobbler's stall, now in Windmill Street, now in Vinegar Yard ; her elder brother a waif of the London streets, watering horses in Hanway Yard ; her mother—but the poor child knows nothing of her mother. She sells flowers, she runs errands—does anything she can to add to the slender intermittent earnings of her father ; oftentimes there is no money in the house wherewith to buy bread. She sang and recited, we are told, at tavern doors. Now and then upon her entreaty a sympathetic waiter at the Bedford or the Shakespeare, under the Piazza in Covent Garden, would inform the company assembled in the private rooms of those hostelryes that a little girl stood without who for a very trifling

payment was willing to deliver select passages from the poets. Perhaps he added a hint as to her beauty and cleverness. She was sent for and hoisted on to a table that she might be the better heard and seen ; then duly dismissed with a few pence by way of reward for her exertions. She was born about 1737 or so ; her name was Fanny Barton. When she afterwards became distinguished, it was thought desirable to trace back her descent to a certain Christopher Barton, Esquire, of Norton, Derbyshire, who at the accession of William III. left four sons—a colonel, a ranger of one of the royal parks, a prebend of Westminster, and the grandfather of the flower-girl. But family trees have time out of mind brought forth very strange fruit. It is certain that Nosegay Fan knew nothing of her gentle origin—of her eminent ancestors.

She became the servant of a French milliner in Cockspur Street, in whose establishment she acquired taste in dress and a considerable knowledge of the French tongue. She was cookmaid, it has been told, in the kitchen over which presided as cook Mr. Baddeley, afterwards an admired performer of foreign footmen and “broken-English” parts ; he had literally “ruled the roast” in the households of Lord North, Mr. Foote, and others ; he then, accepting the post of *valet de chambre*, made the grand tour, and finally trod the stage as an actor. Fanny Barton underwent, indeed, many painful

and ignoble experiences. Her early days were miserable, squalid, vicious enough. But the poor flower-girl strove hard after a better life. She may not be judged with severity; at least, the circumstances of her condition must be remembered in passing sentence upon her; and something of the evil of her career must be charged to the heartlessness of the world in which she lived. "Low, poor, and vulgar as she had been," a contemporary critic writes, "she was always anxious to acquire education and knowledge. It was understood that she was well acquainted with the French authors, could read and speak French with facility, and could converse in Italian." Her rise from obscurity to distinction, from wretchedness to prosperity, was a task of exceeding difficulty; and she had but herself and her own efforts to depend upon. But by dint of industry, indomitable courage, and great natural intelligence she triumphed at last; she struggled desperately with the world, but she tore success from it in the end.

In the summer of 1755 Theophilus Cibber obtained authority to present a limited number of performances at the Haymarket Theatre. The playbill of the 21st August announced the comedy of "The Busy Body;" the part of *Marplot* by Mr. Cibber, jun.; the part of *Miranda* by Miss Barton, "being her first essay." She appeared subsequently as *Miss Jenny* in "The Provoked Husband;" as *Kitty Pry* in "The Lying Valet;" as

*Desdemona* ; as *Sylvia* in "The Recruiting Officer ;" as *Prince Prettyman* in "The Rehearsal," and as *Mrs. Tattoo* in "Lethe." For more than a year she was absent from the London stage, fulfilling engagements at Bath and Richmond. She reappeared in November, 1756, a member of the Drury Lane company, upon the recommendation of Samuel Foote, playing *Lady Pliant* in "The Double Dealer," and various other characters. She continued at Drury Lane some seasons, but in 1759 she had ceased to be Miss Barton ; she was now Mrs. Abington. She had married her music-master, one of the trumpeters in the royal service. She was destined to make his name famous, but their union was attended with much unhappiness. Before long, indeed, terms of separation were agreed upon, and then husband and wife parted company—not to meet again. She consented to pay him annually a stipulated sum upon condition that he forbore to approach her. It is supposed that he survived many years : but nothing very precise is known about Mr. Abington.

Advancement at Drury Lane was difficult. Mrs. Pritchard and Mrs. Clive were firmly possessed of public favour and of the best characters in the dramatic repertory ; while Miss Macklin and Miss Pritchard were younger actresses who had inherited claims to consideration that could scarcely be ignored. Mrs. Abington, deeming it advisable under these circumstances to quit

London for a term, promptly accepted an engagement to appear at the Smock Alley Theatre, Dublin, with a promise of every leading character she could wish. Her success was quite unequivocal—of her performance of *Mrs. Kitty* in the farce of "High Life Below Stairs," Tate Wilkinson writes: "The whole circle were in surprise and rapture, each asking the other how such a treasure could have possibly been in Dublin, and almost in a state of obscurity; such a jewel was invaluable; and their own tastes and judgments, they feared, would justly be called in question if this daughter of Thalia was not immediately taken by the hand and distinguished as her certain and striking merit demanded." Her representation of *Lady Townley* attracted the most crowded houses of the season. The historian of the Irish stage writes: "So rapidly did this charming actress rise, and so highly was she esteemed by the public, even so early did she discover a taste in dress and a talent to lead the *ton*, that several of the ladies' most fashionable ornaments were distinguished by her name, and the 'Abington cap' became the prevailing rage of the day." Mrs. Abington remained five years in Ireland, and then returned to Drury Lane, upon the pressing invitation of Garrick. She soon obtained possession of all the leading characters in comedy. Her most powerful rival, Mrs. Clive, retired from the stage in 1769, at which date Mrs. Pritchard had already with-



drawn. For some eighteen years Mrs. Abington continued to be a member of the Drury Lane company, the most admired representative of the grand coquettes and queens of comedy—greatly successful as *Beatrice*, as *Lady Townley*, as *Lady Betty Modish*, *Millamant*, and *Charlotte* in "The Hypocrite." "Yet," as Tom Davies writes in the lifetime of the actress, "so various and unlimited are her talents that she is not confined to females of a superior class; she can descend occasionally to the country girl, the romp, the hoyden, and the chambermaid, and put on the various humours, airs, and whimsical peculiarities of these under parts; she thinks nothing low that is in nature, nothing mean or beneath her skill which is characteristic." She could appear as either *Lucy Lockit* or *Polly Peachum*, as *Biddy Tipkin* or *Mrs. Termagant*, as *Miss Prue* or as *Miss Hoyden*. Her Shakespearian characters were *Portia*, *Beatrice*, *Desdemona*, *Olivia*, and *Ophelia*. Murphy dedicated to her his comedy of "The Way to keep Him," in recognition of her genius and of those "graces of action" which had endowed his play with brilliancy and even an air of novelty twenty-five years after its first production. She appeared as *Lydia Languish*, and she was the original representative of *LADY TEAZLE*.

Her figure is described as singularly elegant, albeit towards the close of her career she acquired a matronly aspect ill-suited to the youthful characters she was still

fond of impersonating ; she was of graceful address, animated and expressive of glance and gesture. The tones of her voice were not naturally musical, were indeed high-pitched and not very powerful, but her elocutionary skill rendered them pleasing. Her articulation was so exact that every syllable she uttered was distinct and harmonious. Her ease was unaffected, her elegance spirited, her discrimination impressive. Her taste in dress was allowed to be supreme ; she was often consulted in the choice of fashionable ornaments by ladies of quality with whom she enjoyed friendly relations ; "but as it would be absurd to confine her merit to so trifling an accomplishment, she cannot be denied the praise of engaging and fixing the regard of all her acquaintances by her good sense, elegance of manner, and propriety of conduct." Boaden describes her acting as bearing "the marks of great application," and as "at once surprising and delightful. . . . She combined in her excellence the requisites for both the fashionable lady and her maid, and more, much more, than all this. She was the most brilliant satirist of her sex. It is impossible to describe the way in which she spoke the pleasantries of Beatrice ; it almost realized the character given of it by Benedick. . . . There was, in truth, such a tartness in her pleasantry ; she was so fine a speaker of humour, like her friend Tom King, and they were so suited to each other, that they each lost

nearly half their soul in their separation." As Tom King said of her pointed delivery, "every word stabbed." She was the *Comic Muse* of Sir Joshua Reynolds, who portrayed her also as *Roxalana* in "The Sultan," as *Miss Prue* in "Love for Love," and as *Lady Teazle*. Walpole bade her welcome to Strawberry Hill, and as many friends as she might choose to bring with her. "I do impartial justice to your merit," he wrote in 1771, "and fairly allow it not only equal to any actress I have seen, but believe the present age will not be in the wrong if they hereafter prefer it to those they may live to see." Her performance of *Lady Teazle* he describes as "equal to the first of her profession," as superior to any effort of Garrick's; to him, indeed, "she seemed the very person." Generally of the representation of "The School for Scandal" he wrote that there were in it more parts performed admirably than he almost ever saw in any play. "It seemed a marvellous resurrection of the stage. Indeed, the play had as much merit as the actors. I have seen no comedy that comes near it since 'The Provoked Husband.'" At a later date he was less enthusiastic. He decided that Mrs. Abington "could not go beyond *Lady Teazle*, which is a second-rate character, and that rank of women are always aping women of fashion without arriving at the style." Lady Georgiana Spencer wrote to Lord Harcourt, in 1783, that Mrs. Abington "should never go out of the line of

the affected fine lady. In that she succeeds because it is not unnatural to her."

The *Lady Teazle* of Mrs. Abington may have lacked youth, perhaps—for in 1777 the actress was, in truth, but a very few years the junior of the representative of *Sir Peter*—but this defect seems not to have been discerned by the spectators; and assuredly there was no other shortcoming. It was not until many years after the first performance of the comedy that it was proposed to invest *Lady Teazle* with a certain "air of rusticity"—to portray her less as a woman of fashion than as a country girl—in right of Sir Peter's description of her before her marriage: as "the daughter of a plain country squire sitting at her tambour-frame, in a pretty figured linen gown, with a bunch of keys at her side; her hair combed smooth over a roll, and her apartment hung round with fruits in worsted of her own working." Mrs. Jordan was perhaps the first actress who took this rural view of the character. Her predecessors had not *acted* the fine lady; six months of life in London had been sufficient to divest them of their original state; they seemed, in the words of the comedy, "never to have seen a bush or a grass-plot out of Grosvenor Square." Mrs. Jordan delivered the jests and raillery of *Lady Teazle* with something of a hoydenish air; "she quarrelled with her old rustic petulance, and showed her natural complexion; her rouge and her finesse she

reserved for artificial life." It was admitted that she was inferior to Mrs. Abington in dignity, especially in the famous screen scene ; " but," pleads her biographer, " her voice aided her very natural emotion, and though she was not superior in the part, she merited consideration, and to be compared rather with the printed play than with the manner in which it had been acted." At a later date Miss Kelly was to follow Mrs. Jordan in her treatment of the part, and to revive the question of *Lady Teazle's* rusticity. Much critical discussion ensued, and an essay was devoted to the subject in *Blackwood's Magazine* (1826). It can hardly be questioned that Mrs. Abington's *Lady Teazle* met with the full approval of Sheridan, and with the playgoers of his time. Long afterwards the performance was remembered for its force and brilliancy, while even the success obtained by Miss Farren in the character did not efface recollection of the original triumph of Mrs. Abington. She played *Lady Teazle* as a woman of fashion, in full possession of all the manners, characteristics, and even the affectations, of society. She had fairly fascinated Sir Peter, not by her charms as a provincial coquette, but by elegance of appearance, grace of bearing, liveliness of speech, keen sense of humour, and a certain bitterness of satire. As he described her, she " played her part in all the extravagant fopperies of fashion and the town," dissipated his fortune, contradicted his humours, incurred

numberless elegant expenses, was thoroughly the woman of fashion, of fortune, of rank that he boasted he had made her. "I found," writes Boaden, a veteran playgoer, "the younger part of the critical world little aware how much *Lady Teazle* lost in being transferred to Miss Farren. . . . I am perfectly satisfied that Miss Farren, in comedy, never approached Mrs. Abington nearer than Mrs. Esten did Mrs. Siddons in tragedy." But this opinion can hardly have rendered justice to the attractions of the actress who quitted the stage for the peerage—and became Countess of Derby.

Garrick was fated to have many disagreements and disputes with the actresses who were members of his company. He was incessantly engaged in correspondence now with Mrs. Clive, and now with Mrs. Barry, with Miss Younge, Miss Pope, Mrs. Yates, and Mrs. Abington, on the subject of their theatrical and professional duties. He rebuked, he condemned, he soothed, he flattered them each in turn. He was, perhaps, too good-natured with them, or he placed excess of reliance upon his power to cajole them into submission; he seems often to have been peremptory in the wrong place, and yielding when he might fairly have resisted. But he prided himself upon his art as a diplomatist; he delighted to be histrionic both off the stage and on it. A manager of a different stamp would probably have quelled the insubordination and small mutinies of his company after another and

more decisive fashion. Garrick, however, took great delight, it would seem, in plying a pen that was certainly ready enough; so he interchanged numberless notes with his players, discussing with them the terms upon which they should fulfil their duties. Probably by this method of dealing with them he really encouraged the irregularities of which he complained. With Mrs. Abington his difficulties were undoubtedly very great. An idea unfortunately prevailed that he had great power over the public journals; that he could, indeed, turn upon any member of his company that offended him the censure of the newspapers. Here is a note addressed to him by Mrs. Abington upon this subject: "Mrs. Abington has great complaints to make to Mr. Garrick respecting a servant in his theatre for very impertinently writing against her in the newspapers last night, only for begging leave to sit in the prompter's box to see one act of a play on a night that she was to perform in 'Bon Ton,' when her head was dressed ready to begin the farce, which was the reason she could not so conveniently go to any other part of the house." Upon another occasion she writes to him: "If the newspapers are to be made the vehicles of your resentment to me I must justify myself in the best manner I can." Garrick replies rather warmly: "I beg that you will indulge yourself in writing what you please and when you please. If you imagine that I in the least countenance or am

accessory to any scribbling in the newspapers you are deceived. I detest all such methods of showing my resentment. . . . The writing peevish letters will do no business." Presently she is complaining that the characters lawfully in the possession of an actress of her position are yet withheld from her ; that she has received a letter from Mr. Hopkins, the prompter, "dictated in the spirit of incivility and misrepresentation ;" that her excuses on the score of indisposition are not credited. "You say I was well and in spirits at the rehearsal. Indeed, sir, whoever told you so deceived you ; I was very ill, and not able to hold myself up in my chair." That she should be accused of "want of zeal for the cause" distresses her acutely, and she begs that Mr. Garrick will not be angry or treat her with harshness, as he will certainly find her a very faithful and dutiful subject if he will condescend to think her worth a very little degree of attention and consideration ; he behaves with so much unprovoked incivility to Mrs. Abington that she is at a loss how to account for it ; and her health and spirits are so much hurt that she is not able to say what or when she can play.

She was no doubt well aware that her services were very necessary to the theatre, or she would scarcely have tendered resignation of her engagement so frequently or have threatened to withdraw altogether from the profession a score of years before her retirement actually took



place. "If Mr. Garrick," she wrote, "really thinks Mrs. Abington so bad a subject as he is pleased to describe her in all the companies he goes into, she thinks his remedy is very easy, and is willing on her part to release him from so great an inconvenience as soon as he pleases; and only begs while he is pleased to continue her in his theatre that he will not treat her with so much harshness as he has lately done." Again, she writes that she must decline receiving any more salary if she is to be called on to play to empty benches; and solicits that Mr. Garrick "will give her up her agreement, and not make the *Morning Post* the vehicle of his resentment." At one time upon a question touching the night to be devoted to her benefit the opinion of counsel had to be sought. Garrick's replies to the lady evince considerable animation; he is but rarely betrayed into loss of temper. "A little time will show," he writes to her, alluding to his approaching retirement, "that Mr. Garrick has done essential offices of kindness to Mrs. Abington, when his humanity only and not his duty obliged him. As to your wishes of delivering me from the inconvenience of your engagement, that, I hope, will soon be another's concern: my greatest comfort is that I shall soon be delivered from the capriciousness, inconsistency, injustice, and unkindness of those to whom I always intended the greatest good in my power." He describes her as "the worst of

bad women" in an endorsement upon one of her letters. He writes to her: "I never saw yet Mrs. Abington theatrically happy for a week together; there is such a continual working of a fancied interest, such a refinement of importance, and such imaginary good and evil continually arising in the politician's mind, that the only best substantial security for public applause is neglected for these shadows. . . . I am very willing to do you all the justice in my power, and I could wish you would represent me so to persons out of the theatre; and, indeed, for your own sake; for I always hear this tittle-tattle again, and have it always in my power to prove that I am never influenced by any considerations to be unjust to Mrs. Abington or any other performer." No doubt the lady and gentleman were often very angry with each other, and possibly relieved their feelings by means of polite correspondence, the interchange of reproaches, excuses, and tart expressions.

Mrs. Abington was capricious and troublesome; Garrick was jealous of his dignity as manager. They were together in the theatre for many years, but their differences were frequent, the actress at last communicating with her manager by means of her solicitor. Garrick continued to write to her, however; his pen, indeed, was rarely idle; and he was engaged in correspondence of a like sort with various other members of his company, both male and female. On one occasion,

to free himself from the accusation of influencing the press, he produced an affidavit from the Rev. Henry Bate (afterwards known as Sir Henry Bate Dudley), the editor of the *Morning Post*, acquitting him of all share in certain articles that had been published in that journal. Mrs. Abington, it may be noticed, was engaged at Drury Lane upon a salary of £12 per week "with a benefit and £60 for clothes." In those days, however, the *Tragic Muse* appeared alternately with the *Comic*, so that Mrs. Abington was rarely called upon to play more than three times a week.

In 1782 she closed her long connection with Drury Lane Theatre—finding, perhaps, that tragedy too completely possessed its stage—and transferred her services to the rival establishment of Covent Garden, where she remained eight years. Between 1790 and 1797 she was absent from the theatre, and it was believed that her professional career had been fairly brought to a close. But she was induced to return to the stage for a season. "Her person had become full," writes Boaden, "and her elegance somewhat unfashionable; yet she still gave to Shakespeare's *Beatrice* what no other actress in my time has ever conceived; and her old admirers were still willing to fancy her as unimpaired by time as the character itself." George Colman the younger supplied a prologue to reintroduce her to the public. The opening lines were judged to be tender:—

"When Melancholy counts each friend gone by,  
True as Religion strings her rosary,  
The eye grows moist for many in silence laid  
And drops that *bead* which Nature's self has made."

The ravages wrought by Time and matrimony in the ranks of the players obtain mention :—

"Here Death to a chill grave some actor carries,  
Here Hymen beckons—and an actress marries."

Can we not, the poet demands, have back to supply these vacancies some favourite of the *Comic Muse* ?

"Thalia calls—and Abington appears !  
Yes, Abington ! too long we've been without her,  
With all the school of Garrick still about her.  
Mature in powers, in playful fancy vernal,  
For Nature, charming Nature, is eternal !"

A second address, by another writer, contained such lines as—

"Yes, my loved patrons ! I am here once more,  
Though many kindly say that I'm fourscore ;  
Perhaps you think so, and with wonder see  
That I can curtsey thus with pliant knee ;  
That still without two crutches I am walking,  
And, what's more strange, don't mumble in my talking."

But the actress prudently declined to make such pointed reference to her years and her infirmities. She had arrived at a time of life when the question of age is an edged-tooled topic better avoided than trifled with. She was "peculiarly desirous," we are told, of being thought younger than she really was.

The audience received her with great applause. But her return proved to be for one season only. She did not take any formal leave of her public, nor enjoy the honours of a farewell benefit. She was seen for the last time upon the stage on the 12th April, 1799, when she played *Lady Racket* in the after-piece of "Three Weeks after Marriage," the occasion being the benefit of Pope, her fellow-player during many seasons.

She survived until the year 1815, by which time, however, the world would seem to have forgotten her very completely. She was not in want—appeared, indeed, to be in comfortable circumstances, although it was understood that she had gambled away a large portion of her earnings; for the ladies of quality in whose society she rejoiced were much addicted to cards and even to dice. Mr. Taylor, of the *Sun* newspaper, in his Records, mentions having seen her, long after her retirement from the stage, attired in a common red cloak, and with the air and demeanour of the wife of an inferior tradesman. Yet at this time she lived in Pall Mall in the enjoyment of a sufficient income. "I never heard," Taylor writes, "that the theatrical fraternity attended the funeral of Mrs. Abington, as is usual on the death of even the lower order of their community, male and female; neither do I know where she died or where she was buried." He had seen the actress many times. He was present upon the occasion

of her benefit, when, by way of surprising the audience, she undertook the low-comedy part of *Scrub*, playing it recklessly enough, with her hair ready dressed for the character of *Lady Racket*, which she was to assume afterwards; and he once witnessed her representation of *Ophelia* to the *Hamlet* of Garrick, when she appeared, as he judged, "like a mackerel on a gravel walk." He writes: "I remember her keeping a very elegant carriage and living in a large mansion in Clarges Street; but as she advanced in life she became less fit for those characters in which she had chiefly distinguished her talents, and, of course, was less likely to secure an engagement with the theatrical managers." He had met her at Mrs. Cosway's, in Stratford Place, where she was treated with much respect by the company, but she chiefly confined her conversation to General Paoli, who seemed much gratified by her spirit and intelligence. At the house of Mrs. Jordan, in Cadogan Place, Taylor afterwards dined in company with Mrs. Abington when she related many anecdotes of theatrical and fashionable life. Of Garrick she spoke enthusiastically. She was never tired of dwelling upon his merits. "In speaking of the powerful effect of his eyes, she said that whatever expression they assumed, they seemed to operate by fascination; and that in all her intercourse with the world she never beheld eyes that had so much expression, brilliance, and force. She finally observed that, if she

might presume to give an opinion, she would say Shakespeare was made for Garrick and Garrick for Shakespeare." This is laudatory evidence from one of whom Garrick had written : "She is below the thought of any honest man or woman ; she is as silly as she is false and treacherous."

## CHAPTER VI.

### "JOSEPH SURFACE."

"You forget, Jack, *I wrote it*," said Sheridan, when John Palmer approached him with Joseph Surface airs of sanctimonious humility: his body bowed forward, his eyes upturned, his hands clasped; and began in soothing tones, "My dear Mr. Sheridan, if you could but know what I feel at this moment *here!*" and then he laid his hand upon his heart. Palmer had returned, professing penitence, to Drury Lane, after a vain attempt to establish an opposition theatre in Wellclose Square, Goodman's Fields. He was wont to state concerning Sheridan's witty interruption, "It cost him something, for I made him add three pounds per week to my salary." He was designated "Plausible Jack." He protested, "I am not so irresistible as I am said to be; but one thing in the way of address I am able to do. Whenever I am arrested, I think I can always persuade the sheriff's officer to bail me." It so happened that he was frequently arrested. To avoid the bailiffs, he lived



for some time in his dressing-room at Drury Lane Theatre, and was conveyed thence at the close of the season, concealed in a cart full of scenery, etc.

John Palmer was born in 1747, in the parish of St. Luke, Old Street. His father, a private in the Guards, who had served in Germany under the Marquis of Granby, had subsequently filled the offices of door-keeper and bill-sticker to Drury Lane Theatre. It was proposed that young Palmer should follow in his father's steps and enter the army; but the youth was stage-struck. He waited upon Garrick, and, in hopes of an engagement at Drury Lane, rehearsed before its manager the parts of *George Barnwell* and *Mercutio*. Garrick shook his head gravely: he did not think the young man at all qualified to shine in a theatre. Bowing to this decision, he turned his thoughts towards painting: he was for some time assistant or apprentice in a print-shop on Ludgate Hill. Still his thoughts and wishes tended towards the theatre. On the occasion of his father's benefit he was allowed to appear at Drury Lane as *Buck*, in Foote's farce of "The Englishman in Paris." An introduction to Foote followed. Foote, who was engaging a company for the Haymarket, heard the aspirant rehearse, and decided that his tragedy was very bad, but that his comedy might do. He was entrusted with the part of *Harry Scamper*, in Foote's new farce of "The Orators." The Haymarket season

over, he again addressed himself to Garrick, but again in vain. In 1776, however, Palmer seems to have secured a regular engagement at Drury Lane, albeit at a very small salary. About this time he must have been a very unprepared actor. On one occasion it is related, when the part of *Iago* had been allotted him, it was found necessary to relieve him of the arduous task, and to entrust him instead with the inferior character of *Montano*. But he was presently enabled to secure the good opinion of Garrick by very rapidly learning the part of *Harcourt* in "The Country Girl," upon the sudden illness of his namesake, Palmer, who should have sustained the character. This elder Palmer, often confounded with John Palmer, to whom he was wholly unrelated, was the Palmer of the Rosciad :

"Emboxed, the ladies must have something smart :  
Palmer ! oh ! Palmer tops the jaunty part."

Upon his death in 1768 many of his characters were inherited by his young namesake.

He was engaged by Garrick, for four years, at the modest salary of forty shillings per week for the first two seasons, and forty-five and fifty shillings per week for the last two. He was invited to the manager's house at Hampton, to rehearse with him ; and Garrick seemed, indeed, very well disposed towards him, offering an engagement also to his wife, although she was wholly without experience as an actress. She was a Miss Berroughs,

of Norwich, who had fallen in love with the young actor. It was said that he had married her believing her to be an heiress ; her fortune, however, depended upon the favour of an aunt, who was so indignant at her niece's imprudent union, that she renounced her, bequeathing all her property to a domestic servant. The marriage did not result happily. Mr. Palmer had the reputation of being a very bad husband. Mrs. Palmer was a most forgiving wife, and, from all accounts, had very much to forgive.

It was in December, 1785, that Palmer laid the first stone of the Royalty Theatre, in Wells Street, Wellclose Square. Garrick had made his first appearance as an actor in the immediate neighbourhood. It was supposed that the dwellers in Goodman's Fields would lend valuable support to the undertaking, and that playgoers from Western London might be tempted occasionally to the new theatre in the east. Certainly the town at this time was but poorly supplied with playhouses. Covent Garden and Drury Lane were only open in the winter ; the Haymarket was open only in the summer. There were no other London theatres presenting dramatic entertainments of any pretence. It seemed reasonable enough to erect a new theatre at three miles' distance from the old ones. The Royalty was a commodious structure, handsomely decorated, possessed of large galleries ; it aimed at being popular rather than fashionable. But



the West End managers, Messrs. Linley, Harris, and Colman, became alarmed concerning their patents, special privileges, and vested interests. The new enterprise threatened injury to their property. Palmer had engaged a strong company, and contemplated performances of the first class. The theatre opened in June, 1787, with "As you Like it" and "Miss in her Teens." Between the first and second acts of the comedy a youth of fourteen sang "The Soldier Tired;" he was then known as Master Abraham, he was afterwards famous as Mr. Braham, the greatest of English tenors. Above the proscenium appeared an inscription applicable rather to the position of Palmer than to "the purpose of playing"—*Vincit qui patitur*—"He conquers who endures;" or, as Tom Dibdin facetiously translated it: "He conquers who has a patent." It was announced, however, that the proceeds of the representation would be given to the London Hospital. The West End managers had publicly notified that they held the Royalty to be an unlicensed theatre, infringing upon their rights and patents; moreover, they threatened proceedings against the players offending against the Licensing Act, and thereby becoming liable to committal as rogues and vagabonds. Palmer had obtained a magistrate's licence, but this only permitted inferior entertainments, such as dancing, tumbling, and juggling. Further, he was armed with the sanction of the Lord-

Lieutenant of "the Royal Palace and Fortress of the Tower;" this authority, however, was of no real worth. It was clear that he was at the mercy of his rivals. On the opening night he delivered a spirited address, written, it was alleged, by Arthur Murphy. He spoke of "the three gentlemen" who were the only enemies of the undertaking; it would be for them to consider, he said, whether they were not at the same time opposing the wishes of the public. "For myself, I have embarked my all in this theatre, persuaded that, under the sanction I obtained, it was perfectly legal. In the event of it everything dear to my family is involved." This, however, was only a manner of speaking. Mr. Palmer's "all" was of inconsiderable amount; he was without means—indeed, had been always in embarrassed circumstances; certain gentlemen of fortune had supplied the funds for erecting the Royalty Theatre. "I was determined," he went on, "to strain every nerve to merit your favour; but when I consider the case of other performers who have been also threatened with prosecutions, I own, whatever risk I run myself, I feel too much to risk for them. . . . We have not performed 'for hire, gain, or reward,' and we hope that the three managers, with the magistrates in their interest, will neither deem benevolence a misdemeanour nor send us, for an act of charity, to hard labour in the House of Correction. . . . Tumblers and dancing dogs might

appear unmolested before you, but the other performers and myself standing forward to exhibit a moral play is deemed a crime. The purpose, however, for which we have this night exerted ourselves may serve to show that a theatre near Wellclose Square may be as useful as in Covent Garden, Drury Lane, or the Haymarket."

Palmer was summoned before the magistrates, who designed to commit him to prison if he failed to produce his authority for opening the Royalty Theatre in defiance of the rights of the West-end managers. The actor met the justices in the upper room of a tavern. He assured them that his papers were at his lodgings, but a street's length off; if he might himself go for them, he should be back in two minutes. Permission was given. Palmer, "with his usual bow of humility, and turning up the whites of his eyes," prayed Heaven bless the justices for their kindness! He hurried out, closing the door after him—quietly locking it, indeed. It was some time before the magistrates discovered their undignified position. Palmer had made good his escape. There was for the time an end of the proposal to lock him up, and it was necessary to obtain the aid of a locksmith to release his judges.

Palmer's connection with the Royalty Theatre was soon brought to an end. The opposition of the monopolists was too severe; no further attempts were made to present dramatic entertainments of a high class in

Wellclose Square. The new theatre was handed over to the mountebanks, devoted to such musical, scenic, pantomimic, and gymnastic exhibitions as were within the scope of a magistrate's licence. The Royalty was ruled by many speculators, one after the other, bringing profit to none. Now it was under the management of Macready, the father of the eminent actor of that name; now the performers of Astley's Amphitheatre, burnt out of their own establishment in Lambeth, hired the East End theatre for a season. But bankruptcy fell upon its lessees. It was sold by auction in 1820; it was afterwards leased by Messrs. Glossop and Dunn, of the Coburg Theatre; finally it was completely destroyed by fire in April, 1826.

Palmer's debts, not incurred solely on account of the Royalty Theatre, although it was convenient to credit his difficulties generally to that luckless enterprise, now led to his being confined as a prisoner within the Rules of the King's Bench. But, of course, his liberty was not seriously restricted. Certainly, in the time of "day rules," stone walls did not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage. He delivered the popular Lecture on Heads, written by George Alexander Stevens, at the Circus in St. George's Fields, afterwards known as the Surrey Theatre, three nights weekly, at a salary of twelve guineas. Presently he was appearing as *Henri du Bois*, the hero of an attractive melodrama founded upon the

destruction of the Bastille. The principal materials of the play were gathered, we learn, from the newspapers of the time; "the dreadful sufferings of the wretched beings who had been incarcerated in the dungeons of the Bastille, and the uncontrollable effervescence of popular heroism which led to the destruction of that horrid fortress and prison, were faithfully represented." Great applause was bestowed upon Palmer's "noble figure, animated action, and just delineation of the different passions." The theatre was crowded beyond all precedent; as a consequence, the wrath of the West End managers was again kindled against Palmer. He was seized and committed to Surrey Gaol as a rogue and a vagabond. But he was soon released upon an assurance being given that the season at the Circus should be limited to the interval between Easter and Michaelmas.

Peace prevailed for a little while only. The West End managers, Sheridan, Harris, and Colman, on behalf of their privileges, kept jealous watch over the proceedings of the minor theatre. Upon the production at the Circus of a play entitled the "Death of General Wolfe," the part of the hero being sustained by Mr. Palmer, litigation recommenced. Palmer was again, with other members of the Circus company, committed to the Surrey Bridewell, and detained in prison until a verdict of guilty was recorded against the accused at the Guildford Quarter Sessions in July, 1790. This determined



for some years the attempts to present dramatic entertainments at the Circus in St. George's Fields. The next campaign against the patentees was commenced by Elliston in 1809.

Palmer's misfortunes and escapades scarcely prevented his appearance, every season, as a member of the Drury Lane company. He was absent in the season 1789-1790, possibly because of his detention in the Surrey Bridewell; otherwise, from 1766 to 1798, not a year passed but found him winning hearty applause at Drury Lane. Season after season he fulfilled summer engagements at the Haymarket Theatre and at Liverpool. His repertory was most extensive; in Genest's "History of the Stage" nearly three hundred characters are assigned to him, and these are said to be a selection only of his impersonations. He shone alike in tragedy, comedy, and farce. He was handsome, with an expressive face, a commanding presence, and a powerful voice of musical quality. He possessed little education, but he was naturally intelligent; he was elegant and impressive, and "seemed to be led by instinct to the characters most fit for his talents." He performed the tyrants and villains of tragedy with excellent effect; he was famous for his delivery of sarcasm and irony; he was the original *Sneer* in "The Critic." "When shall we see such a *Villeroy* or such a *Stukely* again?" demanded Mrs. Siddons. But no doubt his best suc-

cesses were obtained in comedy, in characters of liveliness and impudence, the bucks, bloods, and saucy footmen of the past. Some idea of his variety or his universality may be gathered from the list of his Shakespearian characters. He played, as might be the more convenient to his manager, *Jacques* or *Touchstone*, *Master Slender* or *Falstaff*, *Hamlet* or the *Ghost*, *Banquo*, *Macbeth*, or *Macduff*, *Iago* or *Cassio*, *Buckingham* or *Henry VIII.*, *Gratiano*, *Bassanio*, or *Shylock*; he appeared as *Petruchio*, as *Prospero*, as *Mercutio*, as *Sir Toby Belch*, as *Faulconbridge*, as *Edgar* or *Edmund* in "King Lear." In "Love for Love" he now personated *Valentine* and now *Ben*; in "The Critic" he was alternately *Puff* and *Sneer*. He played *Abrahamides* in the burlesque of "The Tailors," and *Abomelique* in the melodrama of "Blue Beard." No part seems to have come amiss to him; he was always able to gratify his audience.

Charles Lamb speaks of Palmer as of "stage-treading celebrity:" an allusion to the importance of his histrionic manner. "In sock or buskin there was an air of swaggering gentility about Jack Palmer. He was a gentleman with a slight infusion of the *footman*. . . . When you saw Jack figuring in *Captain Absolute*, you thought you could trace his promotion to some lady of quality who fancied the handsome fellow in his topknot and had bought him a commission." But the

"footman element" must have pertained only to a certain class of his impersonations; it could hardly have affected his *Joseph Surface*, for instance. The character must have been written for him; he was its first representative; it was, in truth, himself. "It is something," writes Lamb, "to have seen the 'School for Scandal' in its glory. It is impossible that it should be now *acted*, though it continues at long intervals to be announced in the bills. Its hero, when Palmer played it, at least, was *Joseph Surface*." And Lamb dwells admiringly upon "the gay boldness," the "graceful, solemn plausibility," the "measured step, the insinuating voice" of the actor. "John Palmer was twice an actor in this exquisite part. He was playing to you all the while he was playing upon *Sir Peter* and his lady. You had the first intimation of a sentiment before it was on his lips. His altered voice was meant for you, and you were to suppose that his fictitious co-flutterers on the stage perceived nothing at all of it. . . . Jack had two voices, both plausible, hypocritical, and insinuating; but his secondary or supplementary voice still more decisively histrionic than his common one. It was reserved for the spectator; and the *dramatis personæ* were supposed to know nothing at all about it. The *lies* of *Young Wilding* and the *sentiments* of *Joseph Surface* were thus marked out in a sort of italics to the audience."

Palmer was, as John Taylor records, "silent in company; but he compensated by his expressive gestures for his taciturnity;" he proved by his manner that he fully understood and enjoyed the wit and humour of others. Taylor noted the ingenuity with which he varied his dumb-show admiration of the facetious sallies of George Colman. "He was a well-bred man, but he carried his courtesy to such an excess as to excite a suspicion of its sincerity." Altogether his nickname of "Plausible Jack" seems to have been well earned. In his case there must often have been doubt as to whether *Joseph Surface* was playing John Palmer, or John Palmer was playing *Joseph Surface*. He has been charged with many acts of humorous duplicity, accomplished perhaps as much for their humour as for their duplicity. He deceived Sheridan upon one occasion, and escaped the performance of an arduous character by pretending to be seriously ill. Sheridan, suspecting a trick, called upon the actor at his house in Lisle Street. Palmer had but a few minutes' notice of his manager's visit. He hurried to his bedroom, enveloped himself in a dressing-gown, drew on a large woollen nightcap, and tied a handkerchief round his jaw; he groaned audibly, his face seemed strangely swollen; he affected to be suffering agonies of toothache. Sheridan was completely duped; he expressed his sincere sympathy with his distressed actor, recommended the

extraction of the tooth, etc. A favourite excuse with Palmer was the accouchement of his wife; and there was this to be said for the excuse, that the lady had in truth presented him with eight children. "He would postpone an engagement by sighing forth, with his white handkerchief to his eyes, 'My best of friends, this is the most awful period of my life; I cannot be with you; my beloved wife, the partner of my sorrows and my joys, is just confined.'" He merely smiled with his usual bland benignity when congratulated by Michael Kelly upon the happiness of having a wife who at least every two months rendered him a contented father. But with all his faults, and they were many, he was a great favourite with the public, and was fondly regarded by his fellow-players. His appearance upon the stage was invariably hailed with loud applause. "He appeared to have been made for the profession, and trod the stage as no other man could do." Acting, both on and off the stage, came naturally to him; otherwise he was a careless student enough of his art, and often failed to commit thoroughly to memory the speeches he was required to deliver in the theatre. But there was dexterity about his very errors. It is told of him that on the production of Hayley's tragedy of "Lord Russell," in which he was to personate the hero, he had wholly neglected to study the text—he was most imperfectly acquainted with the play; but he knew well

the tragedy of the "Earl of Essex," and as it presented points of resemblance to Hayley's work, he glibly recited passage after passage from the old play, adroitly fitting them into the new, so that the audience never discovered his ignorance and incapacity.

Boaden's account of Palmer is curious from its correspondence with Lamb's description. Palmer assumed "fine manners" with great ease; but they were assumed; "he seemed to me to have attained the station rather than to have been born to it. In his general deportment he had a sort of elaborate grace and stately superiority, which he affected on all occasions with an accompaniment of the most plausible politeness. He was the same on and off the stage; he was constantly *acting* the man of superior accomplishments. This it was that rendered Palmer so exquisite in 'High Life below Stairs.' He was *really* my Lord Duke's footman *affecting* the airs and manners of his superiors." If he was not the first of tragedians, he was one of the most useful; he played tyrants because of his grand deportment; he played villains because of his insidious and plausible address. His *Villeroy* in "The Fatal Marriage" "had a delicate and hopeless ardour of affection that made it a decided impossibility for Isabella to resist him. He seemed a being expressly favoured by fate to wind about that lovely victim the web of inextricable misery." Further, Boaden says of him:

“he was the most general actor that ever lived ; . . . he was fairly entitled to the greatest salary in the theatre, as he combined the most general utility with talent, often surprising, frequently excellent, and always respectable. His noble figure and graceful manners threw him into a variety of temptations difficult to be resisted, and sworn foes to professional diligence and severe study.” His habits were expensive, and he affected splendid hospitalities. He was, indeed, irreclaimably reckless and profligate ; “but he would throw up his eyes with astonishment that he had lost the word, or cast them down with penitent humility, wipe his lips with his eternal white handkerchief to smother his errors, and bow himself out of the greatest absurdities that continued idleness could bring upon him.”

Tom Dibdin, who had been apprenticed to an upholsterer in the city, has recorded his boyish enthusiasm on behalf of John Palmer. Dibdin had witnessed the laying of the first stone of the ill-fated Royalty Theatre, and lived to see “the last vestige of its remaining rubbish” after the fire in 1826. “For a sight of ‘Plausible Jack’” he would have done anything—everything. “Deservedly a favourite with the public, to me he was the most enviable mortal I could figure to my perverted imagination.” He describes how warmly he entered into the contest between Palmer and “the tyrannical triumvirate ;” how constantly he attended the perform-

ances at the Royalty. "To my once-favourite actors of the Theatres Royal I could now allow no spark of merit; talent was only to be found at Palmer's, where 'Don Juan,' 'The Deserter of Naples,' and 'A Peep into the Tower,' formed my whole study." The author of the famous pantomime of "Mother Goose" thus obtained his theatrical education.

Palmer's grand presence and lofty airs contrasted somewhat with the humbleness of his origin. He was thought to be too forgetful that his father had been a mere bill-sticker; at any rate, his professional brethren often reminded him of the fact. He entered the green-room upon a certain occasion wearing a valuable pair of diamond knee-buckles, the gift, it was alleged, of an admiring lady of quality. "Palmer, I perceive, deals in diamonds," observed Parsons, the inimitable comedian of that day. "Yes," said Bannister, "but I can well recollect the time when he dealt only in paste." There-upon Parsons whispered to Palmer, "Why don't you stick him to the wall, Jack?"

It was said of him, that when he first, in 1782, played *Stukely* in "The Gamester" to the *Mrs. Beverley* of Mrs. Siddons, he experienced a novel reception from his audience. His personation of the hypocritical villain was so complete, and at the same time so revolting, that the force of the illusion moved the audience to hiss the actor as he left the stage. Upon his reap-



pearance he was greeted with unbounded applause ; but presently the cunning of the scene again took possession of the spectators, and they hissed Mr. Palmer very heartily. He was much gratified by this tribute to the force and skill of his performance.

In the "Children of Thespis," by the scurrilous Williams, calling himself Anthony Pasquin, a full-length portrait of Mr. Palmer is supplied. No man on the stage, it is said, holds so wide a dominion. He is "the Muse's great hackney."

"Come Tragedy, Comedy, Farce, or what will,  
He still gives a manifest proof of his skill . . .  
He still claims applause, though, like Proteus, he changes,  
For equal to all through the drama he ranges,  
And bears with much ease its vast weight on his shoulders  
Till, like Atlas, his powers surprise all beholders.  
So graceful his step, so majestic his nod,  
He looks the descendant from Belvidere's God."

His tragedy is censured, however ; especially his performance of *Dionysius*—

"He out-herods Herod—and tears his poor throat  
Till Harmony trembles at every note.  
Though twelvepenny gods may with this be delighted,  
Common Sense is alarmed and meek Reason affrighted."

His *Joseph Surface* and *Young Wilding* are much praised, but there is some laughing at his love-making :

"Ere love's gentle passion he'll deign to disclose,  
His handkerchief ten times must visit his nose, etc."

and he is reproached for being "fond of porter !"

While fulfilling an engagement at the Liverpool Theatre, Palmer died suddenly, on the 2nd August, 1798. The circumstance of his death has been often narrated. He had been for some time in a depressed condition of mind owing to the recent loss of his wife and of a favourite son, and had freely confessed his fear that these heavy afflictions would bring him to the grave. He had performed, however, with his usual spirit on the night before his death, appearing in his admired character of *Young Wilding* in "The Liar." On the morrow his dejection was extreme; "all the efforts of his friends were scarcely capable of rousing him from the state of melancholy in which he seemed to have sunk." He was bent, however, upon accomplishing his professional duties. The play was "The Stranger;" in the country he personated the hero of that work, contenting himself in London with the inferior character of *Baron Steinfort*. In the earlier scenes he exerted himself with good effect, but as the representation proceeded he displayed evidence of suffering. In the fourth act, when the *Stranger* is required to speak of his children, Palmer became unusually agitated. "He endeavoured to proceed, but his feelings overcame him; the hand of death had arrested his progress; he fell upon his back, heaved a convulsive sigh, and expired immediately." For some time the spectators believed that his fall was merely contrived to add to the effect of the scene; but

the hurried entrance of certain of the actors to remove the body of their departed playfellow undeceived the house; the "utmost astonishment and terror became depicted upon every countenance."

It has been frequently stated that Palmer's last utterance upon the stage was the observation made by the *Stranger* to *Francis* in the third act of the play—"There is another and a better world." In a sketch of Palmer's theatrical career, published very shortly after his death, currency was first given to this version of the circumstance, and it was even proposed that the extract from the play should be engraved upon the actor's tombstone. Reynolds, the dramatist, states, however, upon the authority of an actor named Whitfield, who played *Baron Steinfort* upon the night in question, that Palmer fell suddenly before him on the stage while answering the inquiry as to the *Stranger's* children in the fourth act, and that his last words were really: "I left them at a small town hard by." But the narrative, in its earlier and perhaps more dramatic form, obtained the greater popularity, and has been very frequently repeated. The report that the actor's last words had referred to another and a better world led to a great demand for the play; fifteen hundred copies of "The Stranger" were forthwith disposed of by the publisher. The story, as Reynolds declares, was instantly seized upon by the Methodists, and "most adroitly confirmed and hawked about the

town as a means of enforcing their anti-dramatic tenets," and of demonstrating that severe judgment surely lay in wait for the players.

Mr. Aikin, of Covent Garden Theatre, then manager of the Liverpool Theatre, endeavoured to inform the house of Palmer's death, but his feelings overcame him, and he was unable to articulate a single word. A brief speech from Incledon, the singer, made the audience acquainted with the sad occurrence. The theatre was closed for three nights. The remains of the actor were interred at Warton, a village near Liverpool; the funeral was followed by a long string of coaches. A night was appointed by Mr. Aikin for the benefit of Palmer's orphan family, when an appropriate address, written by Roscoe, was delivered by Mr. Holman. On the 8th August performances, consisting of "The Heir at Law" and "The Children in the Wood," were presented at the Opera House in the Haymarket, under Colman's management, "for the benefit of the four youngest orphans of the late Mr. Palmer." When Drury Lane reopened for the season, on the 15th September, the representation was announced to be for the benefit of Palmer's orphan family. John Kemble played the *Stranger* to the *Mrs. Hailer* of *Mrs. Siddons*; Bannister and *Mrs. Jordan* lending their assistance in the farce of "The Citizen." Barrymore, who succeeded to many of Palmer's characters, though considered to be but a poor substitute for

him, appeared as *Baron Steinfort*. Boaden writes : "The common notion was that the last words uttered by poor Palmer were parts of a passage commencing with an apostrophe to the Deity, and that the agony attending their delivery had destroyed the actor. The house was therefore in considerable alarm till the *real* Stranger had got over words that had proved so fatal, and some degree of surprise buzzed along the seats when Mr. Kemble, in the proper tone of resignation, uttered the calm address to *Francis* in the first scene of the third act : 'Have you forgotten what the old man said this morning? "There is another and a better world!" Oh! 'twas true. Then let us hope with fervency, and yet endure with patience!' Mr. Kemble disappointed apprehension or expectation, and safely survived this important performance of 'The Stranger.'"

The circumstance of Palmer's death inclined many to be credulous in regard to a story of the appearance of his ghost or fetch. The tale has been told by the Rev. J. Richardson, at one time connected with the *Times* newspaper, in his "Recollections of the last Half-Century," published in 1856. Palmer, it seems, retained apartments in a house in Spring Gardens, tenanted by Mrs. Vernon, widow of the comedian and singer of that name, and was accustomed to enter at all hours by means of a latch-key. It was the night of the 2nd of August, 1798. It was known that Palmer was absent from town,

fulfilling a provincial engagement ; but it was thought that he might return at almost any moment. The house was very fully tenanted, insomuch that a youth named Tucker slept in the hall or passage, his couch being "a bed by night, a chest of drawers by day." His services were so laborious in the day that he was allowed to retire to rest at an early hour, long before the other inmates of the establishment sought sleep. Those who entered after nightfall had, therefore, as a rule, to pass the slumbering Tucker on their way up to bed.

It so happened that on the evening in question Tucker had retired to rest at an earlier hour than usual ; but the company in the drawing-room was numerous, and the sounds of merriment prevented him from falling asleep ; "he was in a sort of morbid drowsiness produced by weariness but continually interrupted by noise." As he described the scene, he was sitting half upright in his bed, when he saw the figure of a man coming from the passage which led from the door of the house to the hall. The figure paused on its way for a moment and looked Tucker full in the face. He felt no alarm whatever ; there was nothing spectral or awful about the figure ; it passed quietly on, and apparently mounted the stairs, Tucker recognizing the form, features, gait, dress, and general aspect of John Palmer. He supposed the actor to have returned from Liverpool and quietly entered the house by means of his latch-key. He marvelled never-

theless at the visitor's lack of politeness : he had failed to ask after Tucker's health, or even to wish him good night.

In the morning, during some general conversation with Mrs. Vernon, he mentioned the return of Mr. Palmer, and expressed a hope that he had benefited by his trip to Liverpool. He was assured by the lady that Mr. Palmer had not returned, and most certainly had not joined the festivities in the drawing-room ; the youth must have been dreaming, or drinking, or out of his senses, to imagine such a thing. His delusion, as it was called, was the subject of much amusement, especially as he sturdily persisted in his assertion that he had really seen Mr. Palmer. On the following day news arrived from Liverpool of the sudden death of Palmer upon the stage at about the hour when Tucker avowed that he had seen the actor quietly let himself into the house in Spring Gardens. There was an end to laughter upon the subject, and many were inclined to think that there was much more in Tucker's story than they had at first believed.

"Stories of this sort," writes Mr. Richardson, "like marvellous stories of all sorts, must stand or fall by the evidence with which they are supported. The story is here told as it was told to the writer by the principal party connected with it." This must, of course, have been Tucker himself.

## CHAPTER VII.

### “CHARLES SURFACE.”

AMONG the national pictures stored in the Galleries of Trafalgar Square may be observed a good example of John Hoppner, R.A., the rival of Lawrence, a portrait of “Mr. Smith, the Actor.” He is represented as a comely-looking, middle-aged gentleman with the aspect of a country squire; he wears a powdered wig and a white cravat, he is rubicund and dimpled of face, with cheery blue eyes and a pleasant smile. No suspicion of the theatre attends him; no odour of the lamps; he retired from the stage, indeed, to lead a quiet rural life in Suffolk, to devote himself to field sports and the pleasures of the chase. He was long known as “Gentleman Smith,” presumably to distinguish him from the many members of the large family of the Smiths who could lay no claim to that designation. He was the “Smith, the genteel, the airy, and the smart,” of Churchill’s “Rosciad.” He was the original *Charles Surface* of “The School for Scandal.”



The son of a wholesale grocer and tea-dealer in the city of London, William Smith was born about 1730. His parents destined him to the profession of the Church, and he is to be counted among the few players who have been pupils at Eton. It is told of him that he was rebuked by the head master for exclaiming, "Here's Sumner coming!" Surely he should have said, "*Doctor* Sumner!" Smith disclaimed any intention to be disrespectful, and defended his conduct upon classical grounds. "When the Romans saw Cæsar approaching, they did not say, 'Here comes *Imperator* Cæsar,' but simply, 'Cæsar comes!'" From Eton he proceeded to Cambridge, but his conduct at St. John's College was marked by an eccentricity that exposed him to great censure. While engaged in a frolic with certain of his fellow-collegians the authorities interfered on the side of order: when young Smith was so indiscreet as to snap a pistol at a proctor. The punishment he was sentenced to undergo was more than his pride could endure; to avoid expulsion, he quitted the university and came to London to try his fortune on the stage. He took lessons of Spranger Barry, one of the most admired actors of the time, and on January 1, 1753, made his first appearance at Covent Garden as the hero of Nat Lee's tragedy of "Theodosius, or the Force of Love." He remained a member of the Covent Garden company for twenty-two seasons, entrusted with important occupa-

tion in the theatre, and enjoying the most cordial favour of his audience. In 1774 he accepted an engagement at Drury Lane, and he continued at that establishment until his retirement from his profession in 1788.

On and off the stage alike, Mr. Smith was a fine gentleman. He had advanced, as it were, upon a royal road. He had served no severe apprenticeship; he had undergone no drudgery in barns and country theatres. He had never strolled; he stepped from private life forthwith on to the stage of Covent Garden, and played a fine part before he had ever supported an inferior one. At the close of his long career as an actor he was enabled to boast that he had never been required to appear in farce, to ascend or descend through a trap-door, or to blacken his face. In the summer of 1769 he appeared at Bristol, and he fulfilled an engagement in Ireland during the summer of 1774; otherwise he had never played out of London. Soon after his first essay upon the scene he persuaded a daughter of Lord Hinchinbrook's to become his wife. The lady's friends were indignant, and loudly denounced the *mésalliance*. Gentleman Smith, the grocer's son, was equal to the occasion. He frankly stated that if the family he had disgraced would allow him an income equal in amount to his professional emoluments, he would readily quit the stage and cease to dishonour them by continuing to act; otherwise he should not renounce an occupation

which, however shameful it might seem to them, enabled both himself and his wife to live honestly and happily. Mrs. Smith's friends, holding their pockets in even greater estimation than their pride, declined the actor's offer. The lady died in December, 1762. Gentleman Smith's second marriage with a widow possessed of a large fortune, who survived him some years, was reputed to be the cause of his terminating his theatrical career. However, he was nearly sixty when he retired from the stage; he was perhaps disinclined to be reckoned among the veterans whose superfluous lagging has so often provoked unfavourable remark. To the last he personated heroes of quality, young rakes, and gentlemen of fashion. He had never represented age or infirmity or decrepitude upon the scene. It was as *Charles Surface*—his most famous character—that he finally took leave of his friends and patrons and comrades of the theatre. A few nights before he had appeared as *Macbeth*, the occasion being his farewell benefit.

At Cambridge Smith had been known as "the Buck of his College." He always lived in the best society, retained through life the high connections he had formed at the university, and he was, as Arthur Murphy expressed it, "not only a gentleman himself, but he always gave a gentlemanly character to his profession." He punctually attended the races on Newmarket Heath until quite the close of his career; it was understood,

indeed, that his engagements with his London managers contained a stipulation for leave of absence that he might visit Newmarket at the proper seasons. In an epilogue spoken on the occasion of his farewell benefit, confessing that he finds himself growing old, and desires to resign "the sprightly Charles" to younger heads and abler hands, he alludes to the change about to take place in his method of life :—

"Here I no more shall rant "A horse ! a horse !"  
 But mount White Surrey for the Beacon course ;  
 No more my hands with tyrant gore shall stain,  
 But drag the felon fox from forth his den.  
 Then take the circuit of my little fields,  
 And taste the comfort that contentment yields,  
 And as those sweetest comforts I review,  
 Reflect with gratitude they come from you."

Few actors have avowedly quitted the stage the better to enjoy the pleasures of fox-hunting, although Boaden writes of the players of his time, "that the habit of acting in our great towns during the race weeks has given to our actors, pretty generally, a love for the course, and many of them pique themselves upon never missing such things. Kemble," he continues, "is the only great actor who never talked to me of a gallop after the hounds, and it was not until late in life that he became a horseman." Young may be cited as an instance of the hunting actor. "Two or three days in the week," writes the Rev. Julian Young of his father, "when the managers were playing stock pieces, and

there was no need for rehearsals, he would be sure to be found in the hunting-field."

Smith died in his house at Bury St. Edmunds on September 13, 1819. He had made his first appearance in 1753, the year of Quin's retirement from the stage. He had played with Barry and Mrs. Woffington; he had been a member of Garrick's company; he had played with Henderson, with John Kemble, and Mrs. Siddons. He might have seen Edmund Kean at Drury Lane in 1814, and even Macready's first appearance at Covent Garden in 1816, as *Orestes*, a part Smith had himself supported some forty years before. Smith's life, indeed, comprises "a whole history" of the English stage.

As a tragedian Smith seems to have gratified his public, if critical opinion sometimes pronounced against him. But his merits must have been considerable, or he could scarcely have been allowed year after year to undertake the important duties he accomplished upon the stage. He played *Richard* and *Hamlet* alternately with Garrick; but this was towards the close of Garrick's career. He appeared as *Macbeth* to the *Lady Macbeth* of Mrs. Siddons, and thus incurred the censure of Boaden; for John Kemble, the god of Boaden's idolatry, was quite ready to play *Macbeth* in Smith's stead, and on his retirement promptly succeeded to the part. He played *Romeo*, *Hotspur*, *Marc Antony*, *Cassius*, *Coriolanus*, *Henry V.*, *Edgar*, and *Edmund* in "King

Lear," *Iago*, *Leontes*, and the *Duke* in "Measure for Measure," *Faulconbridge*, *Orlando*, and *Florizel*. Others of his successful characters were *Alexander the Great*, "the haughty, gallant, gay *Lothario*," *Hastings* in "Jane Shore," *Kitely*, *Bajazet*, *Juba*, in Addison's "Cato," and *Glenalvon* in Home's "Douglas." But it was as the *Carelesses* and *Lovelesses*, the *Courtswells* and *Lovemores*, of the comedies of the last century that he chiefly shone, and was declared by his admirers to be quite inimitable and unapproachable. He appeared now as *Young Mirabel* in "The Inconstant," now as *Valentine* in "Love for Love;" he played *Plume*, *Archer*, *Lord Foppington* in "The Careless Husband," *Sir Harry Wildair*, *Lord Townley*, *Don Felix*, *Sir George Airy*, and *Captain Absolute*. If the success he achieved in tragedy owed much to his symmetrical figure, his fine presence, his handsome face, his strong voice, and distinct utterance, these advantages, combined with his good spirits, his well-bred air, his keen sense of humour, and a certain gallant heartiness of manner, secured his complete triumph in comedy. Boaden avows Smith's tragic method to have been uniformly hard and unvaried; he had not profited by the example of Garrick—he perhaps rather followed the teaching of Barry and Quin; for "the very vital principle of Roscius was *point*, and he could no more endure a character set to one tune than he could bear the slightest inattention to the stage

business. Smith's heroes in tragedy all, more or less, reminded you of *Bajazet*—it was the tyrant's vein that he breathed; he looked upon tragedy to be something *abstract*, to which all character was to bend; so that he had but one manner for *Richard* and *Hamlet*. But his nerve and gentlemanly bearing carried him through a world of emotion without exciting a tear, and you were some way satisfied though 'not much moved.' It may be gathered that Smith seemed less natural in the artifices of tragedy than in the artifices of comedy. For it must be remembered that the comedies of the last century pictured a very artificial system of manners. The fine gentleman of the eighteenth century was a distinct creature, elaborately graceful and stately, polished to excess, dignified to a fault. He had undergone degeneration, no doubt; he was less of a personage than he had been. Cibber, referring to the beaux of his youth, credits them with the stateliness of the peacock in their mien, whereas the beaux of his old age seemed to him to emulate "the pert air of the lapwing." Dress had declined in splendour without as yet sinking to the utter unpicturesqueness of later times; and dress was an important element in the character of a fine gentleman, and at once stimulated and controlled his theatrical representations. The clouded cane had to be nicely conducted, and the sword carried and managed dexterously. The head had to be discreetly borne, so

that wig and powder might not be unduly disturbed ; it was necessary to support the tricorne or the cocked hat under the arm. There was a certain art required in taking snuff after a seemly fashion ; adroitness was needed in moving hither and thither in silken stockings and buckled shoes. A lady could only be approached after much respectful bending and bowing ; it required the most delicate address to touch her hand lightly and lead her to a seat. Female dress was then formidably grand ; it was rich in feathers and furbelows, lace, flowers and jewels, hoops and trains. "The flippancy of the modern style," wrote Boaden in 1825, "makes a bow look like a mockery ; it does not seem naturally to belong to a man in pantaloons and a plain blue coat with a white or a black waistcoat. I cannot doubt that what is called genteel comedy among us, suffers greatly from the comparative undress of our times. What can you do, for instance, with such a comedy as 'The Careless Husband' ? Its dialogue could never proceed from the fashionables of the present day. Different times can only be signified by difference of costume. Should we, therefore, venture back to the lace and embroidery, the swords and bags of the last age ? I think not ; the difference from our present costume would excite a laugh. What is the result unfortunately ? We drop or impoverish the comedies."

When Smith first appeared as *Charles Surface* he



must have been forty-seven; King, who played *Sir Peter Teazle*, being exactly the same age; yet no one ventured to think that Smith was too old for the part. All agreed, indeed, that the comedy was most perfectly represented on its first production. Walpole, although he makes no special mention of Smith's *Charles Surface*, wrote enthusiastically of the performance generally. When Charles Lamb first saw the comedy, Miss Farren had succeeded to Mrs. Abington in *Lady Teazle*, and Smith had retired from the part of *Charles Surface*; the other characters, with some few exceptions, were still supported by their original representatives. "No piece," writes Lamb, "was perhaps ever so completely cast in all its parts as this *manager's comedy*. . . . I remember it was then the fashion to cry down John Kemble, who took the part of *Charles* after Smith; but I thought very unjustly. Smith, I fancy, was more airy, and took the eye with a certain gaiety of person. . . . But as far as I could judge, the weighty sense of Kemble made up for more personal incapacity than he had to answer for. His harshest tones in this part came steeped and dulcified in good humour. He made his defects a grace. . . . He would slumber over the level parts of an heroic character. His *Macbeth* has been known to nod. But he always seemed to me to be particularly alive to pointed and witty dialogue." Kemble essayed the part in 1790, when he was only thirty-three;

but his youth was his only advantage over Smith. The performance was not generally admired, was indeed facetiously characterized as "Charles's Martyrdom." Kemble seems to have valued his own effort, however. He wrote to Topham, the editor of the *World* newspaper: "I hope you will have the goodness to give orders to your people to speak favourably of the *Charles*, as more depends on that than you can possibly be aware of." But in a few years the character found a more admired and popular representative in Charles Kemble.

No particular account of Smith's manner of performing *Charles Surface* has come down to us, but we may be sure that his example was followed by later representatives of the part, and that the traditions of his "business"—his method of doing this and saying that—were long cherished in the theatre, and may even now survive, if in rather a faint and feeble way. A character long retains the form it acquired from the actor who first grasped it and impressed upon it the stamp of his genius, and something of Mr. Smith's *Charles Surface* may possibly exist in every performance of "The School for Scandal" even of quite modern date. Allowance must be made for the fact, however, that the rakes and men of quality of the old comedies were not personated by light comedians of the modern school, the flimsy fops who lisp and drawl, trip and amble about the stage. The *Charles Surfaces* of the past may be described as of the

Tom Jones order of heroes : tall of their hands, broad of back, large-calved, loud-voiced, ruddy-cheeked, fond of wine and pleasure, frolic and riot ; there was nothing finicking about their gallantry, they minced matters in no way. Boaden writes of Smith : "In comedy, his *manliness* was the chief feature, yet it was combined with *pleasantry* so perfectly well bred, that I am unable to name any other actors who have approached him. If they had the pleasantry they wanted the manliness ; where there was man enough about them, either the pleasantry was wanting or the manliness checked the pleasantry. Lewis had the pleasantry, but carried to riot, and the manliness, though swelling up to the braggart. Bensley and Aikin were both manly ; but for pleasantry, alas ! it became *satire* in passing their lips."

Mr. Smith's figure increased in substance and physical weight as the years passed. When Shakespeare's "Henry IV." was performed, it had been customary to follow the stage directions implicitly, and *Falstaff* toiled hard to lift upon his back the dead body of *Hotspur*. No joke, we are told, ever raised more mirth in the galleries. Quin had been able to perch Garrick upon his shoulders easily enough ; but desperate exertion was needed when it became Quin's duty to raise from the ground tall Spranger Barry—"in person taller than the common size"—as Churchill wrote of him. How earlier *Falstaffs* and *Hotspurs*—such as Booth and

Harper—managed the scene has not been recorded; but when Henderson played the fat knight his vain endeavours to lift up his portly *Hotspur*, Mr. Smith, led to an alteration in the business of the scene. The *Prince of Wales* entered, and his soldiers considerably relieved *Falstaff* of his labour, and carried off the body of *Hotspur*. This manner of procedure has been usually adopted in all later performances of the First Part of "Henry IV."

Smith's robustness and muscularity were indeed very frequently remarked upon. Campbell, the poet, who was of low stature and slight frame, writes of him: "A potent physical personage he must have been who could swim a league at sea, drink his bottle of port, and after fatigue and conviviality commit his part distinctly to memory." His *Macbeth* incurred some derision because of his weighty form; a stealthy pace could hardly be accomplished by one who trod so heavily that the boards of the stage creaked beneath him and "prated loudly of his whereabouts." Packer, an old actor who played *Duncan*, was absurdly applauded for sleeping so soundly. "Any other actor, besides himself, would too probably have been discomposed by the noise made by *Macbeth* as he ascended." An ironical criticism upon the banquet scene by George Steevens contains reference to the private habits of the *Macbeth* and *Lady Macbeth* of the night. Smith's convivial character was well known, and

Mrs. Siddons had long been accused of excessive frugality. "Mr. Smith, who, during his college life and since, is known to have been an utter enemy to all convivial meetings and prodigalities of entertainment, gave his welcome to the nobles of Scotland with the coldness that might have been expected from one who was compelled to counterfeit an office from which, had it been real, his heart would have revolted. The consequence was obvious; not a knife or fork was lifted up at his bidding. The soul of Mrs. Siddons, on the contrary (Mrs. Siddons, whose dinners are proverbially numerous), expanded on this occasion. She spoke her joy on beholding so many guests with an eagerness little short of rapture, bordering on enthusiasm. Her address appeared so like reality that all the thanes about her seized the wooden fowls, etc., in hopes, alas! to find every dish as warm and genuine as her invitation to feed on it."

It was thought prudent on the part of Sheridan to engage Smith in preference to Henderson, although Henderson must have been the finer artist. But Smith was the more useful actor; if he was only tolerable in tragedy he was held to be most excellent in comedy, and Sheridan was disposed to favour the performers qualified to appear in such comedies as his own. Henderson's talents were of the first order; but it was said of him "he was born for antiquity: the modern dres;

and the modern language did not suit him." His strength lay in the old repertory ; the manager was bent upon producing new plays. Smith was engaged, therefore, as Sheridan's leading actor at the highest salary then paid—fifteen pounds per week. Henderson was forthwith secured at the rival theatre—Covent Garden.

Ten years after his retirement from his profession, May 16, 1798, Smith reappeared upon the stage for one night only, in his character of *Charles Surface*, the occasion being the benefit of his old friend Tom King, the original *Sir Peter Teazle*. He was received with great enthusiasm by an overflowing audience. Mr. Taylor, the author of "*Monsieur Tonson*," who was present, speaks of the tumultuous reception awarded the veteran actor as the curtain rose upon the third act of the comedy, and he was discovered seated at the convivial table with *Careless* and *Sir Harry Bumper* beside him. Again and again the applause was renewed, until he was compelled to quit his chair, come forward and bow to the audience. "Never perhaps on any occasion did an individual in any station receive more hearty demonstrations of public esteem and approbation." *Charles Surface* was now nearly seventy, but time had dealt very kindly with him. Something of his old vigour and buoyancy had departed, but "there was no abatement of his spirit and humour . . . there was the same easy and manly gait." Mr. Taylor relates: "When in the last

act of the play *Lady Teazle* happened to drop her fan, there was a race among the male performers to pick it up and present it to her; but Mr. Smith got the start of them all, and delivered it to her with such unaffected ease and elegance that the audience were struck with the incident, and strongly expressed their applause." Before the fall of the curtain he spoke an address written for the occasion containing the lines—

"At friendship's call, ne'er to be heard in vain,  
My spirits rise—Richard's himself again !—  
Soften your censure where you can't commend,  
And when you judge the actor—spare the friend."

Of Garrick, whom he had first seen at Goodman's Fields in 1740, Smith always spoke with enthusiasm, while confessing that he held his old master Spranger Barry to have been in certain characters quite equal to Garrick, and in love scenes even superior to him. "Garrick," writes Smith, in one of the letters of his old age, "with all natural graces and perfections, must ever, in my now decaying judgment, stand alone, 'the front of Jove himself.' Among the chief blessings of my life I ever held the greatest to be, that I was bred at Eton and born in the days of Garrick." Yet we may gather from that rather oppressive collection of letters, the Garrick Correspondence, that the actor was not always on the best terms with his manager. It was Garrick's misfortune, however, to be unceasingly engaged in tiffs

and squabbles and controversies with the members of his company; and perhaps the players may be fairly considered as a class prone to take offence upon light provocation, unduly sensitive, and curiously irritable. Smith's letters are sprigged with quotations from Horace and Ovid, by way of exhibition of his classical attainments, his University training. He offers his services in regard to the Jubilee to take place in Shakespeare's honour, under Garrick's management, at Stratford-upon-Avon. Garrick allots him the character of *Richard III.* Smith writes: "The post and dress you allot me will be most agreeable to me. . . . If I recollect right, the hat I wear in *Richard* is very shabby. . . . The hat Mr. Powell used in *King John* is a good one, and I should suppose might be had with the ornaments in it; if not I should be glad of yours. . . . You will excuse me mentioning these particulars, as the motive is that I may appear to the best advantage in your train." *Richard*, it seems, was to appear in *King John's* hat! In 1773 Smith had quarrelled with Colman, at Covent Garden, and was in treaty with Garrick for an engagement at Drury Lane, while contemplating the project then on foot for the establishment of a third theatre which might prize highly Mr. Smith's services. Garrick writes sharply: "All matters of business are indeed at an end between them. Mr. G. wishes that they had never begun." Smith replies penitently: "That you are very angry with me is too



evident; that I have never done anything intentionally to deserve your anger is not less true. If to have idolized you deserves your resentment, no one can have been more guilty than your very sincere and faithful humble servant." The quarrel related to Mr. Smith's terms. Was his salary to be twelve guineas or twelve pounds? "When we conversed about the subject," writes Garrick, "and you began to stand upon terms, which surprised me much, I stopped your conversation and handed you over to my brother [George Garrick]; he settles our money matters, for I hate to make bargains, and was sorry that you had any to make; to be short, you were offered what you had at Covent Garden, and refused it." From Smith's explanation Garrick seems to have been needlessly peremptory. "I have never thought of making terms with you," writes Smith; "I have never refused the terms I had at Covent Garden, nor should I had they been offered. I have had for three years past twelve guineas; and Mr. George Garrick never proposed more than twelve pounds; nor did he give me any hint of the probability of my situation being mended." Manager and actor arrange their difficulties at last, and Smith forwards a list of all the parts he can recollect to have played. These are fifty-two in all, and all of importance. As Boaden notes: "These fifty-two characters in which Mr. Smith could be ready at a short notice, amount with their cues and directions to probably five

and twenty thousand lines ; the words of which are to be kept in their exact places, and are presented by the memory with all their associations of place on the stage, action, emphasis, and expression. . . . This is achieved, too, not by a man of plodding scholastic habits ; Mr. Smith delighted in the table, the chase, and the race-course. No profession that we know displays the powers of memory equally with that of the actor." The list furnished by Genest credits Smith with 150 parts ! In one of his letters Smith takes the opportunity of mentioning that he has wasted thirteen pounds in weight, and should he be disengaged at the theatre, doubts not his being qualified to ride at Newmarket in the October meeting. Upon another occasion he writes to Garrick : "As you have been at Newmarket I hope you will now and then step down to the meetings, and that I shall hear you proposed at the first Jockey Club. God bless you."

By-and-by he was to have other difficulties and discussions with his manager. Smith had become desperately enamoured of the beautiful Mrs. Hartley, of Covent Garden Theatre, with whom he had been playing in Dublin. He gives way to much raving and ranting about his Rosamond. At first he is anxious that she should retain her engagement at Covent Garden ; "though it will be irksome to be at different theatres, yet I think it will in some measure take off suspicion."

But soon he is urgent that she should be engaged with him at Drury Lane. "I would not leave my Rose for both the English patents. Reason is a beggar, and passion shuts the door against him. I am *Antony* from top to toe, only, thank God! somewhat younger. You will perhaps say old enough to be wiser," etc., etc. To Garrick he writes: "You could not possibly expect me to remain with you unless you could have engaged us both." And Mr. Garrick is requested "to do all that is proper" to check any suspicions poor Mrs. Smith may entertain touching her husband's indiscretions and misdeeds. Garrick does not engage the lady, and Smith meditates returning to Covent Garden; finds fault with his dressing-room, with the terms of his engagement, and with his employment at Drury Lane. Then there is some trouble about the entertainment of the Jubilee, reproduced by Garrick at his theatre. Smith declines to appear as *Benedick* in the procession. Garrick inquires: "Would your wearing a domino and mask, to take turn about with *me* in walking down the stage, be an injury to your importance?" Smith replies: "Rather than submit to it I would forego the advantage of the stage, which, thank God! notwithstanding the *Morning Post*, I am not quite indebted to for bread. . . . It is now too late for me to appear as *Benedick* in the procession, as I never undertook anything of the kind, and am totally unacquainted with the business. . . . You

may perhaps think me impertinent in my objecting, as you yourself condescend to do it. You, sir, are too considerable in every respect to suffer by it ; I am not. . . . If my feelings are absurd I hope you will pardon them." The *Morning Post*, it may be noted, was in those times rather an unscrupulous organ ; it was edited by Garrick's friend, "the fighting parson," Bate Dudley, and was said to be employed as a means of coercing the players, and especially those engaged at Drury Lane.

Smith's last letter to Garrick is dated 10th June, 1776, the date of Garrick's retirement, and bears his endorsement, "Mr. Smith's farewell note upon my leaving the stage." Smith writes : "As a visit at this time might probably interrupt your attention to more material affairs, I beg leave in this manner to offer my farewell. I am desirous that the little theatrical disagreements we have had may be attributed to a (perhaps) false delicacy in my temper, rather than any other cause, and therefore hope they may be forgotten. As a private man I am under obligations to you which I shall ever remember gratefully. The only returns I have to make are my best wishes for your long enjoyment of health and happiness ; to these permit me to add my respects to Mrs. Garrick, and my hopes that you will do me the favour to believe me, Sir, your sincere and obliged humble servant." In his old age Smith was wont to exclaim : "As to Garrick, my utmost ambition as an

actor was to be thought worthy to hold up his train. . . . I can never speak of him but with idolatry."

Hoppner's portrait was presented to the nation by the late Mr. Serjeant Taddy in 1837. Other portraits of Smith, notably one by Mortimer, are possessed by the Garrick Club. And his friend Sir George Beaumont, famous as an amateur landscape-painter and a patron of artists and of the fine arts, persuaded Mr. Jackson, the Royal Academician, to journey down to Bury to paint a portrait of Mr. Smith when he was over eighty years of age. Taylor relates that he saw the actor on the occasion of his last visit to London but a short time before his death. Under the zealous convoy of Sir George, the veteran had been brought to the green-room of Drury Lane. He was received with most affectionate respect by the actors present. They rose as he entered and thronged round him, "all emulous to testify their esteem and veneration." He corresponded with Taylor to the last, sending up to London now and then copies of verses of his own composing, with translations from Horace and Juvenal, "which fully evinced his taste and scholarship."

In his memoirs (1806), Cumberland speaks of Smith as his "old friend and contemporary," and testifies cordially to his merits. "I had known him at the University, as an undergraduate of St. John's College. . . . As his friend I have lived with him and shared his gen-

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tlemanly hospitalities; as his author I have witnessed his abilities, and profited by his support ; and though I have lost sight of him ever since his retirement from the stage, yet I have ever retained at heart an interest in his welfare ; and as he and I are too nearly of an age to flatter ourselves that we have any long continuance to come upon the stage of this life, I beg leave to make this public profession of my sincere regard for him, and to pay the tribute of my plaudits now, before he makes his final exit and the curtain drops."

## CHAPTER VII.

## "SIR BENJAMIN BACKBITE."

THE gardens of Gray's Inn, as Charles Lamb knew them at the close of the last century, were of far more importance and extent than they now appear, were to be preferred even to the ample squares and classic green recesses of the Temple—"the most elegant spot in the metropolis;" for as yet the rows of houses known as Verulam and Raymond Buildings had not encroached upon their eastern and western sides, cutting out "delicate green crankles" and shouldering away the "stately alcoves" of the terraces; their aspect was altogether "reverend and law-breathing: Bacon had left the impress of his foot upon their gravel walks." They had, of course, long ceased to be the resort of fashion, as in the times when Mr. Pepys walked there with his wife or when Sir Roger de Coverley took a turn upon the terrace, "hemming twice or thrice to himself with great vigour, for he loved to clear his pipes in good air, to make use of his own phrase." Fashion is always flying, flying

westward; holding lands, as it were, upon short leases and not as freeholds in perpetuity. Moorfields, in process of time, so far as "the quality" were concerned, gave way to Gray's Inn Walks, Gray's Inn Walks to the Mall in St. James's Park, the Mall to the Ring in Hyde Park, and the Ring to the Long Walk in Kensington Gardens.

In Lamb's time there were but few houses between Gray's Inn and the northern heights of Hampstead and Highgate. The gardens were a calm and pleasant refuge from the noise and stir of Holborn. It was, as he records, while taking his "afternoon solace upon a summer day upon the aforesaid terrace," he encountered a comely sad personage with the grave air and deportment of one of the old benchers of the Inn. "He had a serious thoughtful forehead, and seemed to be in meditations of mortality. As I have an instinctive awe of old benchers, I was passing him with that sort of sub-indicative token of respect which one is apt to demonstrate towards a venerable stranger, . . . when the face turning upon me strangely identified itself with that of Dodd"—an actor of comedy, famous as the representative of numberless empty fops, fantastical coxcombs, the fools, dullards, and wittols of the old plays. "Few now remember Dodd," wrote Elia, some five and twenty years after this meeting with the comedian in Gray's Inn gardens. "What an *Aguecheek* the stage lost in him!



. . . Dodd was *it* as it came out of Nature's hands. . . . In expressing slowness of apprehension this actor surpassed all others. You could see the first dawn of an idea stealing slowly over his countenance, climbing up by little and little with a painful process till it cleared up at last to the fulness of a twilight conception—its highest meridian. He seemed to keep back his intellect as some have had the power to retard their pulsation. The balloon takes less time in filling than it took to cover the expansion of his broad moony face over all its quarters with expression. A glimmer of understanding would appear in a corner of his eye, and for lack of fuel go out again. A part of his forehead would catch a little intelligence, and be a long time in communicating it to the remainder."

Dodd died in September, 1796. He had not taken formal leave of his profession, but it seemed to be understood that he had completed his career as an actor. He appeared for the last time at Drury Lane Theatre on the 13th June, 1796, when he played *Kecksey* in the farce of "The Irish Widow." Some few weeks before he had taken his last benefit, appearing as *Arces* in "The Rivals," Mrs. Jordan being the *Lydia Languish* of the night. For the benefit of that actress "Romeo and Juliet" had been presented, when she essayed the part of the heroine for the first and only time, and Dodd undertook the character of *Mercutio*. In his last season he had also ventured to

appear as *Polonius*, and had been so unfortunate as to incur the displeasure of his audience by reason of his impersonation of *Adam Winterton* in "The Iron Chest" of Colman the younger. The play had failed, for Kemble had been seriously indisposed, suffering from asthma and from the opiates he had taken to quell its distresses, and a "soporific monotony" had characterized his performance; he had deferred until the last moment appealing to the forbearance of the house and apologizing for the infirmity of his health. Meantime Dodd had been a kind of scapegoat; the audience had found his prattle to be tedious, "the scene in which he was engaged being much too long," as Colman confessed in his preface to the play; disapprobation was loudly expressed, "the audience grew completely soured, and once completely soured everything naturally went wrong; . . . the public were testifying their disgust at the piece through the medium of poor Dodd." It was hard to hiss the old actor in his last season, and for errors that were not of his committing. His voice was weak, but was usually adequate owing to the skill of his elocution; the new Drury Lane Theatre of 1794, however, was built on an enlarged scale that was trying to Dodd's refined and artistic histrionic method. He was more at home in the smaller area of Garrick's Drury Lane. Large theatres demand exaggeration of tone, expression, and action that the player may fall into perspective and assume due pro-

portion upon the stage. Without doubt he was mortified at being selected for the point of censure in the representation of "The Iron Chest;" perhaps he was thus confirmed in his resolution to quit the scene altogether at an early date. Boaden writes of the performance: "It is for the author to judge how far he may choose to venture the exhibition of second childhood, which can neither amuse nor be laughed at; but never did I see more perfect acting than the old *Adam Winterton* of Dodd. Fawcett, who succeeded him, forced out effect by a shrill strong tone of voice and an occasional testiness; but he was not aged nor smooth in the part."

James William Dodd was born in London, it is believed, about the year 1740. He came of respectable parents; his father was a hairdresser; and some education he received at a grammar school which then existed in Holborn. He became stage-struck at an early period of his life, having obtained great applause from a school-boy performance of the part of *Davus* in the "Andria" of Terence. At sixteen he was a member of a strolling company, and played *Roderigo* before a Sheffield audience. At this time he filled with satisfaction to himself any part that was offered to him, and even undertook the chief characters in the tragic repertory. From Sheffield he proceeded to Norwich, where he sojourned some time, toiling hard as a theatrical servant of all work. Presently he secured an engagement at the Bath Theatre, and

there decided that his future efforts should be limited to comedy. His success was indisputable, and in those days some stress was laid upon the approbation of the genteel and fashionable and fastidious audiences of Bath. London was but a short distance from the player who had prospered at Bath. Upon the good report, it would seem, of Dr. Hoadly, the author of "The Suspicious Husband," Dodd was soon engaged at a respectable salary by Messrs. Garrick and Lacy. His first appearance on the stage of Drury Lane Theatre took place on October 3rd, 1765, *Faddle*, in the comedy of "The Foundling," being his first part, and promptly he won the good opinion of the London public. Among the other parts allotted to him during his first season at Drury Lane were Shakespeare's *Osriz*, *Slender*, and *Roderigo*; *Jack Meggot* in "The Suspicious Husband;" the *Fine Gentleman* in "Lethe;" *Sir Harry Wildair* and *Sir Novelty Fashion*; *Marplot* in "The Busy Body;" *Alexis* in "All for Love;" and *Sparkish* in "The Country Wife."

Garrick is said to have selected characters for the new actor well suited to the peculiarity of his genius, and likely to exhibit his merits to the best advantage. It was quickly perceived that he was a thoroughly original artist, that in the representation of certain types of foppishness and fatuity he was quite unrivalled. "There were many parts of low comedy," writes a

biographer, "and in singing pieces, in which he was very useful ; but as a coxcomb he stood for many years alone ; his voice, manner, and above all his figure, were happily suited to express the light vivacity so necessary to complete that character." He first appeared, it may be noted, during the season of Garrick's introduction of a new method of lighting the stage borrowed from the continental theatres. The six heavy chandeliers suspended over the stage, each containing twelve candles in brass sockets, were thenceforth dispensed with. The stage was lit by lamps not visible to the audience. "Taking away the candle rings and lighting from behind—the only advantage we have discovered from Mr. Garrick's tour abroad"—so writes a critic of that period.

For thirty years Dodd remained a member of the Drury Lane company, and faithful to the class of impersonation for which nature seemed to have particularly qualified him. It was said of him that he was the last of the fops whose line commenced with Colley Cibber. It was no doubt true, as Elia wrote sadly, that few remembered the deceased actor. He had slipped out of recollection because the characters in which he so distinguished himself had disappeared from society, had ceased therefore to interest upon the stage, or were only valued from an antiquarian point of view as curious specimens of a departed state of existence. His fops

and fribbles were essentially creatures of the eighteenth century, having little in common with the gallant coxcombs of the Elizabethan stage. These are fantastic enough, Euphuists in their speech, and inclining to the superfine in tastes and dress, but they are rarely afflicted with the effeminacy and insipidity which characterize the Cibberian exquisites, although the "certain lord" whose bald unjointed chat so annoyed Hotspur—

"For it made me mad  
To see him shine so brisk, and smell so sweet,  
And talk so like a waiting-gentlewoman"—

may perhaps be cited as an instance to the contrary. There is little resemblance, however, between the *Mercutio* or even the *Lucio* of Shakespeare and the *Novelty Fashions*, the *Courtly Nices*, and the *Fopling Flutters* of later generations. In Hugh Kelly's poem of "Thespis" Dodd is censured for his "want of all exterior weight," which unfitted him for characters of a manly sort:

"When on those parts he fatally will strike,  
Which urge no scorn, and furnish no dislike;  
There, all his rich inanity misplaced,  
Disgusts alike our judgment and our taste;  
There he provokes our ridicule or rage,  
And melts our Wildair down into a page."

His diminutive person is thus described :

"Blest with the happiest nothingness of form  
Which nature e'er with being strove to warm,

On life's just scale scarce capable to stand,  
 A kind of mandrake in creation's hand,  
 See Dodd in all his tininess of state. . . .  
 Framed at his birth a coxcomb for the stage,  
 He soars the foremost fribble of the age,  
 And struck by chance on some egregious plan,  
 A mere, nice, prim epitome of man,  
 In every coinage of the poet's brain,  
 Who blends alike the worthless and the vain," etc.

Another satirist, styling himself Sir Nicholas Nipclose, Bart., in a poem called "The Theatres," 1772, writes of the actor :

"Who trips it jauntly o'er the sprightly scene,  
 A pretty, pert, significant Pantine?  
 Dodd, who gives pleasure both to ears and eyes,  
 Tho' *duodecimo* of human size."

A later critic, Anthony Pasquin, in his "Children of Thespis," describes Dodd as he appeared towards the close of his career :

"Behold sprightly Dodd amble light o'er the stage,  
 And mimic young fops in despite of his age,  
 Poising his cane 'twixt his finger and thumb, . . .  
 With a vacant *os frontis* and confident air,  
 The minikin manikin prates debonair, . . .  
 And varies in nought from our grandmother's beaus  
 But the curls on his pate and the cut of his clothes."

His *Mercutio* is condemned ; and, indeed, he could hardly have shone as *Mercutio*. To other of his impersonations much praise is awarded :

"Yet his *Drugger* defies the stern critic's detection,  
 And his *Aguecheek* touches the edge of perfection."

Mrs. Mathews, the widow of the elder comedian of that name, has described Dodd as a decided fop both on and off the stage. He was dignified of demeanour, for he piqued himself upon his talents and quality as an actor, and considered he was entitled to general respect alike for his public services and his private virtues; he was proud of his profession, and valued the means whereby he existed scarcely less than his existence itself. No doubt his pompousness of manner contrasted curiously with his physical insignificance. His "white, calf-like, stupid face," as Dr. Hoadly called it, his dancing-master gait, that seemed to combine stalking with tripping, his rotund body, supported by short though shapely legs, always clad in silk stockings, must have presented a certain ludicrousness of aspect. He dressed with invariable daintiness. His coat was oftentimes of scarlet; his hair was much frizzed and powdered, the long queue doubled and twisted until it rested between his shoulders in the form of a door-knocker; his little feet encased in neat shoes of Spanish leather, secured by costly buckles. He is spoken of as the "prince of pink heels and the soul of empty eminence." Miss Pope was wont to say that no one could take a pinch of snuff like Dodd. The amateurs of his time dwell also upon the air of complacent superiority with which he applied the quintessence of roses to his nose, upon the deportment which bespoke



the "sweet effeminacy of his person, upon his profuse display of muslin and lace in his cravat, frills, and ruffles." "One excellence I observe in him," writes Dr. Hoadly from Bath in 1765 ; "he is not in a hurry, and his pauses are sensible and filled with proper action and looks." He was remarkably composed at all times ; "an entertaining companion," says Michael Kelly, "very fond of convivial meetings ; he knew a vast number of comic songs, and was *renommé* for recounting good stories, although it must be confessed they were somewhat of the longest." In regard to his prolixity it is jocosely recorded that beginning at midnight to relate a story of a journey he had taken to Bath, it was six o'clock in the morning before he had arrived at Devizes ! The company prepared to separate, in spite of Dodd's entreaties that they would remain, for he could not bear his stories to be curtailed. "Don't go yet," he cried ; "stop and hear it out ; I promise you I'll make it entertaining."

A singer of taste and skill, if of limited power, Dodd was a constant attendant at the meetings of the Anacreontic Society held at the Crown and Anchor Tavern in the Strand. In the early part of the evening much excellent music was performed, Cramer leading a strong band of stringed instruments. The company, mainly consisting of bankers, merchants, and wealthy citizens, then retired to a large room wherein supper

was provided. Supper concluded, old Charles Bannister was wont to deliver, with powerful effect, the special song of the Society, "Anacreon in Heaven." Then followed favourite catches and glees sung by Webbe, Danby, Dignum, Hobbs, Sedgwick, Suett, and others, relieved by some of Dodd's famous songs. The members of the Society greatly valued the actor, and always lent liberal support to his benefits. "I passed many delightful evenings in this Society," writes Kelly. "I deeply regretted the death of my poor friend Dodd, and with true sorrow followed his remains to the grave. He was one of the original members of the School of Garrick, and always spoke of his great master with the highest veneration and respect." The School of Garrick, it may be noted, was a club in honour of his memory, formed of the players who had been his contemporaries. The meetings were limited to the theatrical season, and held but once in each month. As the old actors departed, their places were filled by younger members. King, Dodd, Moody, Parsons, and the two Bannisters were among the founders of the institution; Mathews, Suett, and Dowton were among the new members. "It was, of all the societies I have ever been in," says Kelly, "perhaps the most agreeable; nothing could surpass it for wit, pleasantry, good humour, and brotherly love." The School of Garrick, however, did not long survive the eighteenth century.

Though Dodd played *Acres* with great success, "looking so blankly divested of all meaning or resolutely expressive of none," the part had been sustained in the first instance by Quick. Dodd, however, rendered very important aid to the representation of Sheridan's plays. He was the original impersonator of *Sir Benjamin Backbite* in "The School for Scandal," and of *Mr. Dangle* in "The Critic;" and when Sheridan altered "The Relapse" into "The Trip to Scarborough"—the play-bill was headed "never acted," as though the comedy were altogether new, and "The Relapse" had not been presented only a few years before—the character of *Lord Foppington* was assigned to Dodd. *Lord Foppington* is one of those characters whose popularity leads to their appearance in several plays. In that respect he was the Falstaff of the eighteenth century. He was first seen as the *Sir Novelty Fashion* of Cibber's "Love's Last Shift, or the Fool in Fashion," claiming descent, without doubt, from the *Sir Fopling Flutter* of Etherege and the *Sir Courtly Nice* of Crowne. Afterwards, in his "Careless Husband," Cibber had raised *Sir Novelty* to the Peerage as *Lord Foppington*. Vanbrugh, in his "Relapse, or Virtue in Danger," which professed to be a sequel to "Love's Last Shift," re-introduced *Lord Foppington*. The lapse of eighty years makes considerable difference in the general view of manners and morals. Vanbrugh believed his comedy

to be so free from offence that he held no woman of a real reputation in town could think it an affront to her prayer-book to lay the innocent play upon the same shelf with it. However, it was felt that the work needed considerable modification when Sheridan took it in hand and renamed it "A Trip to Scarborough."

Dodd had played *Sir Novelty Fashion* and the *Lord Foppington* of the "Careless Husband;" he had not, however, appeared as Vanbrugh's *Lord Foppington* until after Sheridan operated upon the part. *Sir Novelty* sets forth his own character with great preciseness in "Love's Last Shift." "In the first place, madam," he avows to Narcissa, the daughter of Sir William Wisewoud, "I was the first person in England that was complimented with the name of beau, which is a title I prefer before right honourable; for that may be inherited, but this I extort from the whole nation by my surprising mien and unexampled gallantry. Then another thing, madam, it has been observed that I have been eminently successful in those fashions I have recommended to the town; and I don't question but this very suit will raise as many riband-weavers as ever the clipping or melting trade did goldsmiths. . . . In short, madam, the cravat strings, the garter, the centurine, bardash, the steinkirk, the large button, the long sleeve, the plume and full peruque, were all created, cried down, or revived by me. In a word, madam, there has never been anything particularly

taking or agreeable for these ten years past, but your humble servant was the author of it. . . . Then you must know my coach and equipages are as well known as myself, and since the conveniency of two play-houses I have a better opportunity of showing them. For between every act—whisk!—I am gone from one to the other. Oh, what pleasure it is at a good play to go out before half an act's done!" "Why at a good play?" asks Narcissa. "Oh, madam, it looks particular, and gives the whole audience an opportunity of turning upon me at once. Then do they conclude I have some extraordinary business, or a fine woman to go to at least. And then again it shows my contempt of what the dull town thinks their chiefest diversion. But if I do stay a play out I always sit with my back to the stage. . . . Then everybody will imagine I have been tired with it before; or that I am jealous who talks to who in the king's box. And thus, madam, do I take more pains to preserve a public reputation than ever any lady took, after the smallpox, to preserve her complexion." This recital is closely imitated in the account of his manner of life furnished by *Lord Foppington* in "The Relapse."

*Sir Benjamin Backbite* is an exquisite of a much later date, and may be classed among the Macaronis who came in vogue about 1770—"travelled young men who wear long curls and spying-glasses," as Walpole describes them. They had made the grand tour, had eaten

macaroni in Italy with an affected zest, and returned home full of vices and follies, to form themselves into a club called after the dish they pretended to esteem. Sir Benjamin's epigram upon Lady Betty Curricule's ponies—which are likened to Macaronis, "their legs are so slim and their tails are so long"—has lost its point in these later times. But the Macaronis delighted in eccentric costumes; their limbs were very tightly fitted, and looked slim in consequence, while their queues were of prodigious length—"five pounds of hair they wear behind, the ladies to delight, O!" says a comic song of the period; it was their proud object, indeed, to carry to the utmost every description of dissipation, to exceed in effeminacy of manner and modish novelty of dress. The Macaroni Club was as the Crockford's or the Watier's of a subsequent reign, and perished at last of its own excesses. Viscount Bolingbroke writes to George Selwyn, in Paris, in regard to a new suit of plain velvet—that is, without gold or silver trimmings—he wishes Le Duc, the famous French tailor, to make for him: "a small pattern seems to be the reigning taste amongst the Macaronis at Almacks, and is therefore what Lord B. chooses. Le Duc, however, must be desired to make the clothes bigger than the generality of Macaronis, as Lord B.'s shoulders have lately grown very broad. As to the smallness of the sleeves and length of the waist, Lord B. desires them to be *outré*, that he may exceed

any Macaroni now about town, and become the object of their envy." Dodd, as *Sir Benjamin Backbite*, seems to have furnished a perfect portrait of a coxcomb of the Macaroni type.

The limits of Dodd's histrionic capacity being considered, the list of characters he sustained is surprisingly ample. He personated the fops and the imbeciles, young and old, of comedy and farce. In addition to the Shakespearian parts already mentioned, he appeared as *Cloten*, as *Gratiano*, as *Launce*, as *Elbow*, as *Polonius*; on the occasion of his benefit he even undertook the part of *Richard III.* He was famous as *Master Stephen* in "Every Man in his Humour," as *Abel Drugger* in "The Alchemist." Among other of his characters may be enumerated *Jerry Sneak* and *Jerry Blackacre*, *Watty Cockney* in "The Romp," and *Master Johnny* in "The Schoolboy," *Jessamy* in "Lionel and Clarissa," and *Ben* in "Love for Love," *Humphry Gubbin*, *Tattle*, *Count Bassett*, *Fribble*, *Scribble*, *Brisk*, *Scrub*, *Lord Trinket*, *Sir Harry Flutter*, *Sir Brilliant Fashion*, and *Sir Benjamin Dove*.

He was known popularly as Jemmy Dodd, and was no doubt believed, with other favourite comedians, to carry into private life the merriment and facetiousness which attached to his public career—to be as ludicrous and diverting off the stage as he was on it. Lamb relates of his merry friend Jem White—the author of

"Falstaff's Letters" and the originator of the Chimney Sweeps' Suppers in Smithfield—that having seen Dodd play *Sir Andrew Aguecheek*, and meeting him the next day in Fleet Street, he was irresistibly impelled to take off his hat to the actor and salute him as the identical knight of the preceding evening with a "Save you, Sir Andrew!" Dodd, it seems, by no means disconcerted at this unusual address from a stranger, with a courteous half-rebuking wave of his hand, put him off with an "Away, fool!" And in presence of the old actor in "the serious walks" of Gray's Inn—where he was perhaps "divesting himself of many scenic and some real vanities—weaning himself from the frivolity of the lesser and the greater theatres—doing gentle penance for a life of no very reprehensible fooleries—taking off by degrees the buffoon mask which he might feel he had worn too long, and rehearsing for a more solemn cast of part"—Elia accused himself in that he had laughed at a face that once seemed so vacantly foolish and was now so sadly thoughtful. "Was this the face, manly, sober, intelligent, which I had so often despised, made mocks at, made merry with? The remembrance of the freedoms I had taken with it came upon me with a reproach of insult. I could have asked it pardon. I thought it looked upon me with a sense of injury. There is something strange as well as sad in seeing actors—your pleasant fellows particularly—subjected to



and suffering the common lot; their fortunes, their casualties, their deaths, seem to belong to the scene, their actions to be amenable to poetic justice only. We can hardly connect them with more awful responsibilities."

Dodd died and left no successor. The traditions of Cibber's fops departed with him. The clouded cane, the china snuffbox, the essence of bergamot, the protuberances of endless muslin and lace, all the appurtenances of coxcombry of the old school, were interred in his grave. "How it happened I do not know," writes Boaden, "but no actor seems to have made Dodd his model." Edwin, when about to appear as *Sir Andrew Aguecheek*, took his seat in the pit of Drury Lane expressly to study Dodd's performance of the part. On going out Edwin observed to a friend, "It is indeed perfection. Something I hope to do with the part, but I cannot touch him in his own way." Boaden pronounced Edwin's performance to be, like all he did, quite irresistible; but he hastened to add, "the smoothness, the native imbecility of Dodd were transcendent. Edwin could not entirely reach that paragon of folly."

Dodd was a student of dramatic literature, and a collector of early editions at a time when prices were low—for the passion of book-collecting was not yet at its full. His large and valuable library, dispersed at his death, realized more than thrice its original cost. The

sale, conducted by the predecessors of the house of Sotheby & Co., lasted nine days. Dodd also cherished an odd fancy for collecting the warlike implements of the North American Indians.

Dr. Hoadly, writing to Garrick from Bath in 1765, reported very favourably of Mrs. Dodd. "A very genteel sensible woman, fit to fill any part of high life, especially if written with any sensibility and tenderness. . . . The affected drawl of *Lady Dainty* became her much, and in *Mrs. Oakley* I could not see a fault. She was not a moment out of the character, and amazingly proper and ready in the repartee. . . . After all, I wish that these excellences may not be almost totally lost for want of that force of voice requisite to pierce all parts of a large and crowded theatre. . . . She is tall, and made no bad figure in breeches. . . . I suppose she must sing tolerably at least, for she plays *Polly* to his *Macheath*, which they say is excellent." Mrs. Dodd did not appear on the London stage, however, or failed to make much impression there.

John Taylor, in "Records of My Life," mentions that Dodd "supported an aged father with filial affection," and gave a good education to his son, who entered the Church.

## CHAPTER IX.

## "MR. CRABTREE."

THE first scene of "The School for Scandal," as every one knows, represents the dressing-room of *Lady Sneerwell*. She is discovered at her toilet, in colloquy with her confidential agent, *Mr. Snake*, who sips chocolate as he discusses the family affairs of the Teazles and the Surfaces. Presently her ladyship, the widow of a city knight with a good jointure, holds a kind of reception, much after Lady Squanderfield's manner, as represented by William Hogarth some thirty years before in the fourth of the "Marriage à la mode" pictures. In the foreground people of fashion and quality assemble and gossip; at the back are plainly visible her ladyship's bed and dressing-table. *Mr. Joseph Surface* appears; whereupon *Mr. Snake* departs. Then *Maria* enters, to be followed by *Mrs. Candour*. The servant next announces "Mr. Crabtree and Sir Benjamin Backbite;" and forthwith the Wasp and Butterfly of the comedy buzz and flutter about the scene.

The first personator of *Mr. Crabtree* was William Parsons, a valued actor of the old men as distinguished from the old gentlemen of comedy. He did not pretend to an air of fashion ; his aspect was somewhat unrefined ; his manner, perhaps, lacked polish and elegance. He was seen at his best in strongly delineated characters, to which some grossness of humour, some violence of colouring, was permissible. A suspicion of low comedy attended his efforts in the loftier paths of the drama. But he was distinctly an artist in the completeness and conscientiousness of his impersonations. It is ascribed to him as a peculiar merit that he fully possessed the art of *immersing* himself in the characters he assumed. He paid "a happy attention," we are told, to all the minutiae of representation ; portrayed in the most finished manner the infirmities, mental and physical, of age, the passion of avarice, the folly of dotage : the "tottering knee, the sudden stare, the plodding look, nay, the taking out of a handkerchief," all proclaimed him a consummate actor in his own particular line. When he appeared as *Fore-sight* in "Love for Love," and was addressed by Sir Sampson Legend as "Old Nostradamus," and described as "poring upon the ground for a crooked pin or an old horsenail with the head towards him," there could not be, a biographer asserts, a finer illustration of Congreve's character—"an illiterate old fellow, peevish and positive, superstitious and pretending to understand astrology,

palmy, physiognomy, omens, dreams, etc.”—than Parsons afforded at that time in face and attitude. As *Crabtree*, of course, the actor had a very different task to accomplish. *Crabtree*, prominent among the scandal-mongers who give the work its title, is, with his compeers, but slightly connected with the real plot of the play. Yet in the hands of a competent performer *Crabtree* always figures entertainingly upon the scene. He is so busily malicious, he has so reduced spitefulness to a system, detraction and calumny are such joys to him : even the pride he takes in introducing and encouraging his nephew *Sir Benjamin*, in demanding an exhibition of his pretty wit, a repetition of his absurd epigrams and charades, is but an excuse for more and yet more mischief-making. Moreover, *Crabtree* is entrusted with certain of the best passages in the tattle of the scandalous college ; he tells the ridiculous story of Miss Letitia Piper and the twins ; he relates the dealings of *Charles Surface* with the Jews ; and he describes in the most detailed manner the duel which did not occur between *Charles* and *Sir Peter*, when—“*Charles's* shot took effect, as I tell you, and *Sir Peter's* missed ; but, what is very extraordinary, the ball struck against a little bronze Shakespeare that stood over the fireplace, grazed out of the window at a right angle, and wounded the postman, who was just coming to the door with a double letter from Northamptonshire !” A fable more convincingly circumstantial could not be,

William Parsons was born on the 29th February, 1736, the son of a carpenter in Bow Lane, Cheapside, whose circumstances were far from affluent. The father, however, was bent upon giving his boy a good education, and accordingly placed him at St. Paul's School, in which "garden of emulative genius," as a biographer superfinely describes it, young Parsons exhibited intelligence and acquired some learning. He won the approval of his masters on account of his diligence and docility, while he was esteemed by his schoolfellows because of the kindness of his disposition, his unflagging drollery and good nature. Already he discovered a certain taste for the drama; he invested his pocket-money in the purchase of plays, and greatly indulged in poetical recitations and elocutionary exercises; the schoolroom often resounded with his rehearsals of "the pleadings of Antony, the oratory of Brutus, and the rage of Richard." At the age of fifteen he was apprenticed to Sir Henry Cheese, a well known surveyor.

During the last century there flourished in London various "spouting clubs," as they were called. These were assemblies of young men—apprentices for the most part—and among apprentices were then classed the pupils of professional men—held in the larger rooms of the taverns, for the promotion of conviviality, speechifying, recitations, and amateur theatricals. Parsons had become a member of a society of this description, meeting now

at the Bird Cage, in Wood Street, and now at the Horns, in Doctors' Commons. He had made the acquaintance of Powell and Holland, young men of his own standing, already inclining towards that histrionic profession of which they were presently to become distinguished ornaments. In truth, Parsons had become "stage-struck." It was in vain that Sir Henry Cheese complained of his pupil's idleness and negligence. It was in vain that old Parsons expostulated, warned, and scolded. The youth declined to be advised; soon abandoned his desk in the surveyor's office, and enrolled himself, a raw recruit, in the army of the players. "Though I run from Cheese, I fear not meeting with bread," he cried, with a light heart, and the pleasantry was much applauded by his friends of the "spouting club."

He shared the delusion to which comic actors seem invariably subject: he believed himself a tragedian; and among his fellow-apprentices he strutted for some time as *Romeo* and *Richard*. In 1756 he first appeared before the public, on the occasion of a benefit, at the Haymarket Theatre; he essayed the part of *Kent*, his friend Powell impersonating *Edmund*. At this time Parsons was thought to be the better tragedian of the two. He was wont to say in later life that it took seven years to perfect Powell in tragedy, and about the same time to convince himself that in comedy lay his own best chances

of success. He obtained an engagement at York and won much applause at Southampton in the tragedy of "The Earl of Essex;" he was subsequently entrusted with the leading characters in tragedy and in genteel comedy. From York he removed to Edinburgh upon the offer of liberal terms and a long engagement. The discovery of his comic powers seems to have been very much a matter of accident. In consequence of the departure for Dublin of one Stamper, a comedian much admired on the Edinburgh stage, Parsons was required to assume, at a very short notice, the character of *Lovegold* in Fielding's "Miser." "The audience," we read, "expected little more than a reading; but, to their surprise, he sustained every scene with increasing excellence, and when the curtain fell, Stamper was no longer regretted, nor would his appearance, after this evening, have been welcomed, had he returned to the part." Parsons' skill in portraying the characters of old men soon obtained further demonstration, and a severe attack of asthma which now first afflicted him, and which recurred frequently throughout his life, probably confirmed him in this line of impersonation. His vocal infirmity was even an aid to his assumption of elderly characters. He remained some four or five years in Edinburgh, marrying there; his wife enjoyed considerable reputation as an actress of saucy chambermaids, romps, and hoydens. His fame attracted the attention



of Garrick, always eager to strengthen his company, and careful, by the introduction of new actors, to control the more established performers.

Parsons first appeared at Drury Lane, on the 21st September, 1762, as *Filch* in "The Beggar's Opera," his wife personating *Mrs. Peachum*. It was said that at this time Garrick entertained no great opinion of the abilities of Parsons, but engaged him chiefly for the sake of his wife; he hoped that Mrs. Parsons might rival Mrs. Clive in popularity, and that the pretensions of the elder actress might be subdued by the presence of the new-comer. In this respect he was disappointed: Mrs. Clive was not to be so easily opposed, still less surpassed. "Mrs. Parsons' abilities were very tiny, indeed," writes Charles Dibdin; "in nothing but the size of her person was she superior to Mrs. Clive." Garrick, however, seems to have protected his own interests very sufficiently. He had secured Parsons' services upon very moderate terms, awarding a larger salary to his wife. But he soon dispensed with Mrs. Parsons' aid altogether, and then, by way of checking the rise of Parsons, engaged an actor named Hartry to rival his impersonations and appear in the same class of characters. In a poem of the time, dealing with the theatres, the actors are coupled in the lines:—

"Parsons and Hartry with strong power of face,  
Give sportive humour oft successful chase," etc., etc.

Hartry's merits were not considerable, however. Meanwhile Parsons advanced, if but slowly in the first instance. Few parts of importance were allotted him during his earlier seasons in London. Yates and Shuter were in such full possession of the more prominent characters of comedy that he was even constrained to appear insignificantly in tragedy, now personating *Gratiano* in "Othello," now *Lenox* in "Macbeth," and now *Douglas* in the first part of "Henry IV." But it began to be perceived that he was a very original performer, and that his histrionic method, if less droll than Shuter's, or less forcible than Yates's, was yet remarkable for its fidelity to nature. It was admitted presently that in such characters as the antiquarian *Periwinkle*, in "A Bold Stroke for a Wife," and the fond *Alderman Smuggler* of "The Constant Couple," he could afford comparison with the best of contemporary players. Garrick became sensible that the new performer was a real acquisition to the theatre, and that he possessed the art of making much of very small parts. Thenceforward the manager, in arranging his farces for representation, was careful always to provide a character for Parsons. This was the less difficult, in that Parsons found pleasure in personating choleric fathers and testy guardians—characters indispensable to farce. "It was determined," writes a biographer, explaining the actor's choice of parts, "to make that respectable which had never been so con-

sidered before ; and by studying the pettish peevishness and other passions of 'old men, and contemplating in real life what effect these had on the voice, the face, nay, the very gait, he gave so faithful a portraiture of nature, that though the subject was not handsome, it was universally admired for its extraordinary similitude." It was admitted that the parents and guardians of the stage are usually but the means of displaying the superior brilliancy of the other characters : "they introduce that humour which others utter ; they are the three first lines of the epigram of which the fourth is the point."

Between Garrick and Parsons the most cordial relations were soon established ; they became, indeed, the best and firmest of friends. For upwards of thirty years Parsons remained a member of the Drury Lane company, resisting the very liberal offers he received from Dublin, and remaining loyal to Garrick even when strongly tempted by his early playfellow, Powell, to desert with him to Colman at Covent Garden. During the summer he accepted engagements to appear at the Haymarket or at Liverpool and other places in company with his friend John Palmer, the *Joseph Surface* of "The School for Scandal ;" but the return of winter surely found him again at Drury Lane. He was a prudent, thrifty man, and had soon saved sufficient to purchase a share in the Bristol Theatre, in association with the actors Reddish and Clarke. But he grew weary of his responsibilities,

and in three years withdrew from this enterprise ; his natural mildness of disposition ill fitted him, it was said, for the post of manager. He built himself a summer retreat in the neighbourhood of Mead's Row, St. George's Fields, bestowing upon his house the title of Frog Hall. In a publication called the *General Magazine and Impartial Review* appeared a drawing, after Woollett, of the actor's house. A century ago this portion of Lambeth boasted a picturesque and rural air. Frog Hall appears to have afforded much pleasure to Parsons and his friends. Woollett was wont to exercise himself in a small boat or punt upon the confined piece of water fronting the house. Palmer described Parsons' summer retreat as possessing a nine-pin alley for a foreground and a pigsty in the middle distance, with a wash-hand basin for a fishpond. An open and very unsavoury ditch adjoining the Apollo Gardens seems, however, to have been a source of some discomfort to the tenant of Frog Hall.

Parsons was endowed with fair skill as a draughtsman, and lent material aid in illustrating the monthly numbers of the *General Magazine*. Michael Kelly mentions that in the little drawing-room of Frog Hall were several admirable landscapes by Parsons, and that he was generally accounted a very good artist. During his early struggles as an actor he had been able to increase his small salary by painting landscape studies, fruit and

flower pieces, for the picture-dealers, displaying, we are informed, "very decent execution, much judgment, and no small portion of taste and fancy." It is related, indeed, that "a celebrated landscape painter of that time" availed himself of Parsons' abilities, and, "without any diminution to the respectability of his professional character," sold as his own works pictures executed, in truth, by the actor. Charles Dibdin says of Parsons' pictures that they were "very respectable productions," but that Parsons was more a critic than a painter, more elaborate than spirited; that he paid more attention to the adjustment of parts than to the general effect, "and thus, although he was a very good copier of a picture, he was by no means a first-rate copier of nature." Dibdin and Parsons worked together as painters, Sir Joshua Reynolds supplying them from his gallery with examples for imitation. A picture, the joint performance of the songwriter and the comedian, was publicly exhibited about 1772 at the large room at the Lyceum, erected by the Society of Incorporated Artists of Great Britain, the precursor and rival of the Royal Academy. Parsons is said to have also profited by dealing in the works of old masters, so-called—a very lucrative trade a century ago. His own paintings and drawings were, shortly after his decease, sold by public auction in Christie's Rooms, and realized considerable prices.

Genest, in his "History of the Stage," furnishes a

list of upwards of one hundred and fifty characters assumed by Parsons at Drury Lane and the Haymarket Theatres. Among his Shakespearian parts may be enumerated *Shallow*, *Dogberry*, *Sir Hugh Evans*, the *First Gravedigger* in "Hamlet," the *First Witch* in "Macbeth," the *Clowns* in "Measure for Measure" and "Twelfth Night," *Bottom* in a version of "A Midsummer Night's Dream," *Gardiner* in "Henry VIII.," *Silence* in "Henry IV.," Part II., *Gobbo* in the "Merchant of Venice," and *Elbow* in "Measure for Measure." He was the original representative, the *creator*, as the modern term has it, not merely of *Crabtree*, of *Sir Fretful Plagiary*, and of *Probe* in "A Trip to Scarborough," but of many other characters very popular and famous in their day, but scarcely known, even by name, to the modern stage, such as *Sir Christopher Curry* in "Inkle and Yarico," *Lope Tocho* in "The Mountaineers," *Snarl* in "The Village Lawyer," *Diggery* in "All the World's a Stage," *Doyley* in "Who's the Dupe?" *Cranky* in "The Son-in-Law," *Dr. Bartholo* in "The Spanish Barber," *Whittle* in "The Irish Widow," etc. He undertook the established low-comedy parts of *Scrub*, *Jerry Sneak*, *Mawworm*, *Solomon*, in "The Quaker," the *First Recruit* in "The Recruiting Officer," *David* in "The Rivals," *Davy* in "Bon Ton;" and he played what are called the stock old men of the theatre, such as *Justice Woodcock*, *Sir Solomon Sadlife*,

*Colonel Oldboy, Sir Francis Wronghead, Sir Francis Gripe, Mr. Hardcastle, Justice Greedy, etc.* He accounted as his best part *Corbaccio* in Ben Jonson's "Volpone," adding, "but all the merit I have in it I owe to Shuter. The public are pleased to think that I play the part well, but his acting was as far superior to mine as Mount Vesuvius is to a rushlight."

During the closing years of his life Parsons suffered more and more from asthma. "He told me that usquebaugh relieved him," writes Boaden; "but it quieted the irritation by slow destruction; he was almost a shadow when he died." In a poetic effusion, entitled "The London Theatres," published the year of his death, he is thus apostrophized:—

"Parsons ! Dame Nature's wonder and delight,  
How hast thou, child of merriment and glee,  
From Garrick's golden age to those we own,  
With tender frame (for many a year assailed  
By meagre Asthma's all-destroying power)  
Come forward to thy friends, while equal warmth  
Of friendly greeting passed on either side !  
The while, too evident to all, appeared  
The lurking illness struggling with the will," etc., etc.

To benefit his failing health he made some few summer excursions—matters less easy of accomplishment then than now. "Our first trip was to Margate," writes his biographer simply, "and never before had I scented salt water and experienced the elegant accommodation of a Margate hoy. . . . At eight in the



morning we sailed from Billingsgate, but winds unfavourable to our course, at four in the afternoon, had wafted our bark no further than Deptford, and the captain, to add to our *satisfaction*, informed us we must go ashore, and there wait till seven in the evening for a forwarding gale." Further incidents of travel are recorded : a storm of wind and rain, thunder and lightning, the alarming rolling of the vessel, and the distressing sickness of the passengers. "A stranger before to any expanse of water exceeding that at Chelsea Reach, I viewed the turbulent and rolling waste I now moved on with awe and admiration." By nine on the following morning, however, the travellers were enabled to view "the white and rugged steeps of Margate" and to stand upon its pier. Other excursions to Southampton, Salisbury, the Isle of Wight, etc., are also related, with a gravity and particularity which now, owing to the changes wrought by Time in regard to travel, wear almost a burlesque air.

It was with despondent feelings Parsons watched the demolition, in 1792, of the theatre in which his best successes as an actor had been achieved and he had passed his happiest hours. But Sir Christopher Wren's Drury Lane, erected in 1674, having stood for nearly one hundred and twenty years, now gave place to Holland's theatre, opened for dramatic representations in April, 1794, and totally destroyed by fire in February, 1809. Parsons gloomily predicted that he should not long



survive the old house ; but as he noted the rising walls of the new building he expressed a hope that his health would permit him to reappear in Drury Lane Theatre. His shattered constitution, however, suffered gravely from the damp walls, the fresh paint, and the draughtiness of the new house. Still he played on through a bitterly cold winter, to add, as he said, a little more to the purse he had been long preparing for his wife and son, that they might be independent when he was at rest. His friend Baddeley, the original representative of *Moses* in "The School for Scandal," died suddenly in November, 1794. Parsons took the sad event much to heart. "Poor Baddeley!" he said ; "I thought he would have lasted longer. Well, well, it will be the same way and the same thing with poor Parsons one of these days. This cruel winter has done his business, and, depend upon it, it will do mine too." He was too ill to attend the funeral of the departed actor, but he stood at a window to watch the procession pass, reproaching himself because of his infirm state. "I ought to have followed the coffin," he said pathetically ; "Baddeley would have followed mine had I been the first to die." *Crabtree* did not long survive *Moses*, however.

He took no formal leave of his public, but it had become clear to all that his career was approaching its close. Late in 1794 he appeared in his favourite characters of *Crabtree* and *Foresight*. His last new

part was *Elbow* in Kemble's revival of "Measure for Measure." On the 2nd January, 1795, he was announced to play *Old Doyley* in "Who's the Dupe?" but he was unable to appear, and another play was substituted. He rallied, however, in a few days, and resumed his performances of *Lope Tocho* and *Moneytrap*. On the 19th he was seen for the last time upon the stage. He personated his original character of *Sir Fretful Plagiary*, one of his most famous efforts. We read, however, that "illness had now destroyed his powers; vain the attempt to rally them! They were gone for ever. It was truly affecting to behold the deep concern pictured on the countenances of the audience when their old favourite felt himself obliged to recline on a chair on the stage, amidst applause mingled with pity and regret on the part of the audience, and expressive signals of total decay on that of the performer." As he quitted the theatre he said sadly to his wife, "I come here no more." Then he mentioned that he had seen young Bannister watching his performance of *Sir Fretful* from the side wings. "Well, well, he'll play it next time." In April, Bannister duly undertook the part. Its succeeding representatives were Dowton and Mathews. Other of Parsons' most admired characters, including *Crabtree* among them, were allotted to Suett. A critic writes: "Suett was a good actor, but he did not appear to advantage in the characters which Parsons had

played ; few performers could have played them better, but Parsons was not to be forgotten."

Parsons survived until the 3rd February. A few days before his death he attended a sale of pictures at Greenwood's, and was complimented by many friends upon the excellence of his spirits and the improvement in his appearance. It soon became apparent, however, that his mind was disordered ; one arm swung helplessly at his side ; he had been attacked by paralysis. He was conveyed to his house in Lambeth. He suffered acutely, and continued for some hours in a state of delirium. During his wanderings a servant inadvertently entered the room, carrying a picture which a friend, unconscious of his afflicted condition, had sent, desiring his opinion as to the value. Mrs. Parsons interposed, but the suffering man had caught a glimpse of the canvas, demanded that it should be brought to him, leaned forward eagerly and examined it keenly. A ruling passion asserted itself. His old picture-dealing habits had strong hold of him. "Take it away, take it away," he cried presently ; "it's not worth one farthing."

The remains of Parsons were interred in the churchyard of Lee, Kent. Lines by Charles Dibdin were inscribed upon the tombstone. Messrs. Colman, Aicken, and Caulfield attended the funeral as representatives of the theatrical profession.

Soon after the decease of his first wife, which oc-

curred in 1787, Parsons had married Dorothy, one of the three daughters of the Hon. James Stewart, brother to the Earl of Galloway. It was said that the lady was a sort of heroine of romance ; that she had escaped from a convent at Lisle, where, much against her will, she had been placed by her brother, and, coming to London, had accidentally encountered Parsons, and besought his protection. Adventures such as this do not usually befall asthmatic low comedians of fifty. Parsons, who was at this time possessed of considerable property, made Miss Stewart his wife. A son was born of this union, who survived his father some few years only. A report that Mrs. Parsons had found in the person of her son's tutor a second partner so immediately upon the demise of her first, that she had for some days a dead and a living husband in the house at the same time, was probably a calumny. It seems to be agreed, however, that the widow did not wait long before she married again.

A portrait painted by De Wilde in the last year of Parsons' life, exhibits the actor as of very slender proportions, with a grave, pallid, careworn face, and calm, thoughtful expression. The eyes are fine and piercing, the brows are strongly marked and quaintly arched, with the mobile look due to constant exercise in efforts of impersonation. But the face wears little of the aspect of the conventional low comedian. Another picture,

painted by Vandergucht, in the possession of the Garrick Club, represents Parsons, with his playfellow Moody, as *Obadiah* and *Teague* in Sir Robert Howard's comedy of "The Committee."

Upon the opening of the Haymarket Theatre, in the summer of 1795, a curious tribute was paid to the memory of Parsons, while marked evidence was afforded of his exceeding popularity. Colman had provided an occasional prelude, entitled "New Hay at the Old Market," relating to his managerial hopes, prospects, and intentions. In the course of a dialogue between the prompter and the head carpenter of the establishment, the following passages occurred:—

"*Carpenter*. We want a new scaffold for the 'Surrender of Calais.'

"*Prompter*. Ah! when shall we get such another hangman? Poor fellow! Poor Parsons! the old cause of our mirth, is now the cause of our melancholy; he who so often made us forget our cares may well claim a sigh to his memory.

"*Carpenter*. He was one of the comicallest fellows I ever see.

"*Prompter*. Ay, and one of the honestest, Master Carpenter. When an individual has combined private worth with public talent, he quits the bustling scene of life with twofold applause, and we doubly deplore his exit."

The "Surrender of Calais" was a play of Colman's, in which Parsons had won applause as one of the workmen charged with the erection of a scaffold for the execution of the citizens condemned to death by King Edward. The workmen conversed over their labours after the manner of the gravediggers in "Hamlet." Upon one occasion, when this play was presented by command of King George III., Parsons took upon himself to alter the text of one of his speeches. He was required to say: "So the king is coming; an the king like not my scaffold I am no true man." He substituted: "An the king were here and did not admire my scaffold, I would say, 'D—n him, he has no taste.'" It is evidence of the licence permitted the old actors that this impudent alteration of the text was much enjoyed by the audience, the king, we are told, being moved to very hearty laughter. But Parsons was a privileged person; his great popularity placed him beyond the reach of criticism; his fame as a comic actor, his singular power of moving laughter, secured indulgence and favour for anything he might choose to say or do upon the scene. And, no doubt, a tendency to excess was a defect in his acting. Dibdin describes him as over desirous of giving satisfaction to every part of his audience, and as inclined to strain his voice from his "perpetual anxiety to be unnecessarily audible." We may conclude that for the sake of pleasing the gallery he sometimes sacrificed his

art and unduly condescended to caricature. An admiring critic admits, indeed, that occasionally "the warmth of his imagination carried him a little too far," but hastens to add that "the audience were oftener more in fault than himself." He was often required to appear in very eccentric and highly seasoned farces, in which extravagance of aspect and manner was almost demanded of the performer. But while he could, as well as any buffoon or pantomimist of the time, outstep the modesty of nature, it was urged that he could also confine himself "within her rigid pale, and conform to the strictest demands of her immaculate government." His own sense of humour was very strong, and at times could hardly be restrained within bounds. "His whim was incessant, elicited in a thousand different ways and productive of mirth through a thousand different channels. With a fund of genuine English drollery he combined the Italian gesticulation and the French loco motion. . . . The laugh he once provoked he could prolong by a variety of stratagems, apparently unforced, till the audience were absolutely convulsed and the actors in the same scene with him became incapable of conducting its progress." It was even said that he adapted to professional purposes the malady under which he so long laboured, "with as much good humour as ingenuity" converting his difficulty of breathing to "a source of innocent hilarity."

Michael Kelly notes that Parsons was much bent upon extorting laughter from the actors engaged with him in the duties of representation, and relates how, in the course of a performance of "The Doctor and Apothecary," his singing was rendered impossible by the extravagant pranks and antics of Parsons. Upon this occasion, however, Kelly, by a previous declaration that his absorption in the characters he assumed and his respect for his audience were always too great to be disturbed by the drollery of any one appearing with him upon the scene, had really invited Parsons to an unusual display of comicality. As a rule, the actor seems to have excited mirth by very little exertion on his own part. Daves inquires, "Who can be grave when Parsons either looks or speaks?" and describes him as "born to relax the muscles and set mankind a-tittering." So, too, Boaden writes: "He was formed to excite laughter; and although he would sometimes sport with those about him, and enjoy his triumph over their muscles, he was yet a faithful delineator of character. He had a figure, a gait, a countenance, a voice that marked him out as the actor of old men in comedy. . . . His *Fore-sight* was a perfect thing, and his *Corbaccio*, in 'The Fox,' astonished and delighted his best judges. . . . Nor was his expression confined to his face, amply as the features did their office; but every passion circulated in him to the extremities, and spoke in the motion of



his feet or in the more striking intelligence of his hands. . . . He was a master in his exhibition of vulgar importance. . . . But it was perhaps reserved for Sheridan to show to the utmost what Parsons could achieve in *Sir Fretful Plagiary* in 'The Critic.' I have frequently enjoyed this rich treat, and become sensible how painful laughter might be when such a man as Parsons chose to throw his whole force into a character. When he stood under the castigation of *Sneer*, affecting to enjoy criticism which made him writhe in agony; when the tears were in his eyes and he suddenly checked his unnatural laugh to enable him to stare aghast upon his tormentors; a picture was exhibited of mental anguish and frantic rage, of mortified vanity and affected contempt, which would almost deter an author from the pen unless he could be sure of his firmness under every possible provocation." Surely this was a fine actor!

It was an accusation against Parsons that he kept "low company." There seems to have been little warrant for the charge. In the lives of men of the last century, the tavern often figures prominently; the tavern, however, was then very much what the club is now. For the sake of a fish dinner, served there daily at three o'clock, Parsons frequented the Black Jack, in Portsmouth Street, Clare Market; but the Black Jack was no ordinary public-house, nor was Clare Market

the vulgar and unsavoury precinct it became in later years. The Black Jack—known for some while as the Jump, because of Jack Sheppard's having once leapt from a window on the first floor to escape the emissaries of Jonathan Wild—had enjoyed the continuous patronage of the famous Joe Miller. Mr. Cyrus Jay, solicitor, who published in 1868 a volume of *Recollections*, professional and otherwise, writes of a club of barristers and attorneys holding its meetings every Saturday evening at the Black Jack, in a very large room, with many pictures of old actors adorning the walls. "The dinner was plain and the wine good," he writes. "On one Saturday I had the honour of dining at the club with the late Mr. Curran, formerly Master of the Rolls, Dublin. Many of the members were very able speakers; one of the best was Mr. Charles Pearson, proctor. . . . A Mr. Quinn, a common councilman of the Ward of Farringdon Without, and a Mr. Ayrton, who, I fancy, was the father of the present member for the Tower Hamlets, were also sure to make speeches. . . . I lately visited the room and found it quite altered, the pictures gone, the tavern become a common public-house, and lines were hanging from one end of the room to the other, on which clothes were drying." Oftentimes Parsons was to be found in far humbler establishments than the Black Jack. But, as Dibdin urges, he was thus enabled advantageously to study nature for histrionic

purposes. "The quaintness, vulgarity, humour, and whim which he observed in a tap-room were as the ore from which he extracted his theatrical gold." At any rate, we may rest satisfied that he suffered no material injury from his studies of low life; a biographer assures us that he was "warm and sincere in his friendship, affectionate and attentive in his domestic situation, upright and honest in all his dealings."

## CHAPTER X.

"MRS. CANDOUR."

GARRICK at one time busied himself about an Infant School of Actors; children from their earliest years were to be trained to the service of the stage, specially instructed in histrionic art and the accomplishments necessary to theatrical success. The plan made some progress, if it was unattended by important results. In December, 1756, Garrick produced at Drury Lane his farce of "Liliput," founded upon the first book of "Gulliver's Travels." "The piece was acted by boys and girls all tutored by the manager, and the parents of not less than a hundred were most liberally rewarded." Murphy adds that the author had, further, a moral object in view; he hoped that "at the sight of such diminutive creatures adopting the follies of real life, the fashionable world would learn to lower their pride, and the dignity of vice would be lost." It is not to be believed, however, that Garrick laid much stress upon the didactic quality of the production. "Liliput" was excellently

represented by the children and was frequently repeated. And two of the young performers—and but two—became afterwards known to fame, and took rank among the mature members of the company. A character called *Lord Flimnap* was personated by a Master Cautherley—a son of Garrick's, so people whispered—who acquired some favour at a later date as a hero of domestic tragedy, playing *George Barnwell* and like parts, and obtaining from his fellows the designation of “the Gentle Cautherley,” which, perhaps, does not say much for his force as an actor. And a character called *Lalcon*, “Gulliver's keeper,” was admirably sustained by a Miss Pope, a little girl of twelve or so, whose career upon the stage, commenced thus early, did not terminate until the year 1808. In 1761 Churchill was applauding her still girlish efforts :

“ With all the native vigour of sixteen,  
Among the merry group conspicuous seen,  
See lively POPE advance in jig and trip,  
Corinna, Cherry, Honeycombe, and Snip.  
Not without art, but yet to nature true,  
She charmed the town with humour just, yet new.  
Cheered by her promise, we the less deplore  
The fatal time when CLIVE shall be no more.”

Miss Pope was the original representative of Sheridan's *Mrs. Candour* in 1777, and of his *Tilburina* in 1779. Charles Lamb wrote of “charming natural Miss Pope, the perfect gentlewoman as distinguished from

the fine lady of comedy ;" referred to "Churchill's compliments still burnishing upon her gay Honeycombe lips ;" and dwelt upon "the true scenic delight, the escape from life, the oblivion of the consequences, the holiday barring-out of the pedant Reflection, those Saturnalia of two or three brief hours well won from the world," afforded by the performance of "The School for Scandal" in its best days. Hazlitt remembered her as "the very picture of a Duenna, a maiden lady or antiquated dowager . . . more quaint, fantastic, and old-fashioned, more pert, frothy, and light-headed, than anything that can be imagined." And only a year before her retirement from the scene Leigh Hunt described Miss Pope as "the only natural performer of the old gentlewoman . . . in true comic humour, and in temperate, unaffected nature, yielding to no actress upon the stage."

Jane Pope was the daughter of a respectable tradesman who carried on his business in Great Russell Street, Covent Garden. Apparently she obtained her only theatrical education in Garrick's Infant School ; she served no apprenticeship in the provinces, she never strolled to learn her art, gather confidence and experience ; but within a very few seasons of her first essay as a child in "Liliput" she was enrolled as a permanent member of Garrick's company, charged with the duty of impersonating pert hoydens and saucy chambermaids.

When in 1759 Vanbrugh's "Confederacy" was revived, the performance was sufficiently remarkable. The playbill announced that the parts of *Brass*, *Dick*, *Moneytrap*, *Clarissa*, and *Flippanta* would be sustained by King, Palmer, Yates, Mrs. Pritchard, and Mrs. Clive; that Tate Wilkinson would attempt the character of *Mrs. Amlet*; and that, as *Corinna*, "a young gentlewoman" would appear for the first time. The young gentlewoman was Miss Pope, whose success was very great. Mrs. Clive, indeed, thought it well to warn the beginner that the hearty applause she had received was not wholly due to her merits, but arose in some part from the good nature of the audience. "You acted very well," said the actress of experience; "but in future you must endeavour to act better, and to be content with less applause, otherwise disappointment will be in store for you; be prepared for the capriciousness of the public; do not allow it to damp your spirits, or you will fail to do yourself justice." These sage counsels of the veteran were listened to patiently and gratefully by the recruit; Mrs. Clive and Miss Pope became firm friends. *Dolly Snip*, in "Harlequin's Invasion," described in the playbills as "A Christmas gambol in the manner of the Italian comedy," and presented after a performance of "George Barnwell," was the next part allotted to the young actress—who, as all agreed, acquitted herself admirably. This pantomime was contrived by Garrick, who found

his materials in an older work produced at the Goodman's Fields Theatre in 1741, where Garrick himself is alleged to have worn once or twice a harlequin's patch-work jacket. Harlequin is supposed to invade Parnassus and the kingdom of Shakespeare, to be expelled thence at last, however, with all his "fantastic train." The characters were not mute, but conversed freely; King, for the first time, playing harlequin, and Yates appearing as *Snip*, a tailor. The success of this entertainment led to its frequent revival. Even as late as 1820 "Harlequin's Invasion" was presented at Drury Lane, when Miss Pope's character of *Dolly Snip* was undertaken by Madame Vestris.

During the season of 1759-60 Miss Pope also appeared as *Miss Biddy* in Garrick's "Miss in her Teens," as *Miss Prue* in "Love for Love," as *Miss Notable* in Cibber's "Lady's Last Stake," and as *Jenny* in "The Provoked Husband." In the following season she played *Cherry* in "The Beaux' Stratagem," and was entrusted with an original character which she rendered specially famous—the heroine of Colman's farce of "Polly Honeycombe." The author aimed at satirizing the readers of modern novels as distinguished from the old-fashioned romances, the prologue setting forth :

"But now the dear delight of later years,  
The younger sister of ROMANCE appears ;  
Less solemn is her air, her drift the same,  
And NOVEL her enchanting, charming name.



ROMANCE might strike our grave forefathers' pomp,  
But NOVEL for our buck and lively romp !  
Cassandra's folios now no longer read,  
See two neat pocket-volumes in their stead ;  
And then so sentimental is the style !  
So chaste, yet so bewitching all the while," etc.

Polly Honeycombe is nearly related to Biddy Tipkin on the one hand and to Lydia Languish on the other. Indeed, Sheridan's comedy owes something to Colman's farce. Honeycombe's concluding speech—"A man may as well turn his daughter loose in Covent Garden as trust the cultivation of her mind to a circulating library"—probably inspired Sir Anthony Absolute's animadversion on the same subject. "Polly Honeycombe" became one of the most popular of afterpieces, and was always assured of a hearty reception so long as Miss Pope was willing to appear as the heroine. But more ambitious occupation awaited her. Retaining her hold upon the romps and Abigails, she now appeared as certain of the fine ladies of the theatre, personating *Lady Flutter* in Mrs. Sheridan's new comedy "The Discovery," the widow *Belmont* in "The Way to Keep Him," and *Araminta* in Whitehead's "School for Lovers." When Garrick, in 1765, made his first appearance after his return from the continent, and "Much Ado about Nothing" was performed by royal command, it was to Miss Pope that the character of *Beatrice* was assigned, complete success attending her efforts. She undertook

few other Shakespearian parts ; but she long continued to be a famous *Audrey*, and she appeared from time to time as *Lucetta* in the "Two Gentlemen of Verona," as *Mrs. Page* and as *Katharine* in the farce to which Garrick had reduced "The Taming of the Shrew." Into the tragic repertory or anywhere near it she never ventured ; but the excellence of her acting was thought to compensate for her imperfect singing when she attempted a musical character, and represented *Lucy* in "The Beggar's Opera."

Her list of parts was greatly extended upon the retirement of Mrs. Clive in 1769. Churchill's prediction was verified : the loss of that actress was less deplored in view of the admirable art, the abundant humour, of Miss Pope. She now played *Flippanta* instead of *Corinna* in "The Confederacy," *Mrs. Frail* instead of *Miss Prue* in "Love for Love," and was greatly applauded even in the most popular of Mrs. Clive's characters, such as *Nell* in the old farce of "The Devil to Pay," and *Kitty* in "High Life Below Stairs." She was advancing from the hoydens, the chambermaids, and fine ladies to the more mature gentlewomen of the drama. She appeared now as *Mrs. Oakley* in "The Jealous Wife," now as *Lady Brumpton* in "The Funeral," now as *Mrs. Doggrel* in "The Register Office," and now as *Mrs. Sneak* in "The Mayor of Garratt." In 1775 the term of her engagement with Garrick expired. She expressed a desire for

its renewal with an increase of salary, "throwing herself upon Mr. Garrick's or the proprietors' generosity to name what addition to her appointment they might think her diligence deserved." Garrick in the name of the patentees acknowledged "not only her diligence but her merit," expressed a hope that she would continue for many years to come a member of the Drury Lane Company, but disregarded altogether her application for an increase of salary. The lady evidently felt herself much aggrieved, and wrote back in very tart terms. She presented her respects to the patentees; she was much honoured in their commendations both as to her merit and her diligence. For the former she had been infinitely overpaid by the public, "who had ever shown her the greatest favour without a paragraph to prejudice them." Her diligence concerned the managers; she looked to them to reward it. She demanded ten pounds per week, "the sum usually paid to actresses in her walk." She could not upon any other terms remain at Drury Lane. If the patentees objected, though she should quit the theatre with infinite regret, she was "determined to shake all affection off, and, like the Swiss, to perform only with those that pay best." The patentees, in reply, while expressing regret at losing Miss Pope, declined to increase her salary; they wished her "every happiness that her change of place and sentiments could give her;" Garrick, on his own account,

professing that he had shown "a little more than *Swiss attachment* to Miss Pope." It was clear that Garrick was much offended; the allusion to the press—the hint as to the creation of prejudice by means of paragraphs—was particularly disagreeable to him; but with other members of the company Miss Pope believed that the manager, who was a shareholder in certain journals, employed his interest with the newspapers in conducting his theatre and controlling his players. Miss Pope quitted Drury Lane, but sought in vain occupation at Covent Garden. She soon perceived that she had acted rashly and hastily; she longed to be back again in Garrick's theatre. Three months later she wrote to him, frankly acknowledging her error, and humbly imploring him to forgive her and to be still her friend. "I have no resource," she wrote, "but going to Ireland, which, though it prove advantageous, must render me miserable, as it separates me from my family, with whom I have ever lived in the most perfect affection. You will have the goodness to remember that this is the first disagreement we ever had in the course of fourteen years, and you will the readier pardon it when you consider that a little vanity is almost inseparable from our profession, and that I unfortunately listened to its dictates and have made myself unhappy." Garrick was obdurate, however; he was steeled against the poor lady's touching appeal. He had made other arrangements; he had prepared for

her loss, distributed her parts among the other actresses ; he could offer her no re-engagement, etc. She went to Ireland, therefore, writing to him in the following year a sympathetic letter on his retirement from the stage. She acknowledged the service he had rendered it ; she could not be charged with flattery, she said, as every interested view was at an end between them from his having relinquished the theatre. She concluded : " I am not sorry this was my year of banishment, since it would have given me much greater pain to be present ; and though small was the fault which caused our separation, and severe the penalty, yet, believe me, you never had a sincerer votary." Could he resist this homage ? He had retired from the active exercise of his profession, but he remained one of the patentees of Drury Lane Theatre. Already the staunch Mrs. Clive had addressed him on behalf of her " poor unfortunate friend Miss Pope," with a view to her re-engagement at Drury Lane. " By this time I hope you have forgotten your resentment," she wrote ; and she proceeded to remind him that Miss Pope had been a faithful creature, on whom he could always depend, certainly a good actress, amiable in her character, " both in her being a very modest woman and very good to her family, and to my certain knowledge has the greatest regard for you." She concluded : " Now, my dear Mr. Garrick, I hope it is not yet too late to reinstate her before you quit your affairs ; I beg

it, I entreat it. I shall look upon it as the greatest favour you can confer on your ever obliged friend, C. CLIVE."

At length Garrick yielded. Mrs. Clive's appeal was not to be resisted, or he was roused to a more complete sense of the value of Miss Pope's services. Personally he owed her much. Not only had she played *Beatrice* to his *Benedick*, and *Cherry* to his *Archer*; she had sustained characters in several of his own plays, and greatly contributed to their success. She was re-engaged upon her own terms. She had formerly received eight pounds per week only; she was now accorded ten pounds. It was not a particularly liberal salary, even for those days. The whole quarrel had arisen upon a question as to an extra forty shillings per week for an excellent actress and a great public favourite! Without doubt, Garrick had been needlessly despotic in dealing with the lady.

Miss Pope had now grown somewhat portly of form, as her critics soon began to remind her; for the critics of the last century, from Churchill downwards, were quick to discover and denounce the personal defects and physical infirmities of the players. Hugh Kelly, in his scurrilous poem "Thespis," published in 1766, wrote of—

"That shapeless form to grace so unallied,  
That roaring laugh and manliness of stride,"

and referred to Miss Pope's too hearty enjoyment of

"scenes of turbulence and noise." A later satirist, in 1772, describing the actress as "Ten years ago a sprightly lass," demanded, "But will increase of flesh now let her pass?" But if she sometimes assumed characters for which her proportions and aspect unsuited her, it was always at the request of her manager, and generally with the consent of the public. In 1777 the part of *Mrs. Candour* was allotted her. James Smith, one of the authors of "Rejected Addresses," has suggested that if "The School for Scandal" had been brought to the theatre by "some starved hackney sonneteer," Parsons would not have acted *Crabtree*, and Dodd would have been fined rather than perform *Backbite*. "I even doubt," he continues, "whether Baddeley would have taken to the *Jew*, and Miss Pope would have unquestionably demurred about *Mrs. Candour*. Not that those parts are bad in themselves, but there is too great an interval between the first and last appearance of the scandalous club. They get out of sight, and consequently out of the mind of the audience. Moreover—an inexpressible sin in the perception of a player—there are better parts in the play." But the author was also the manager, and his company could scarcely decline to support the comedy: a cast of great strength resulted. Miss Pope's success as *Mrs. Candour* was most decided. In certain theatrical circles the actress soon acquired the private alias of "Mrs. Candour,"

because she had been the first to play that part, and also because of her readiness to undertake the defence of any one who chanced to be attacked. At the same time James Smith wrote: "Not a particle of wrong or sarcasm was mingled with her encomiums. I never heard her speak ill of any human being. . . . I have sometimes been almost exasperated by her benevolence. In cases of the most open delinquency, I could never entice her into indignation. 'I adore my profession,' I have heard her say more than once." And she would tolerate no censure of any of its members.

She was a little quick of temper, however, as her correspondence with Garrick demonstrated; and in his *Reminiscences* Michael Kelly has narrated how upon a particular occasion the lady stormed and raged and vowed vengeance against him! There had been a revival, it seems, of Shakespeare's "Jubilee," originally devised by Garrick; an absurd sort of pageant with personifications of the *Tragic* and the *Comic Muse*—Mrs. Siddons and Miss Farren assumed these characters in 1787—and a grand procession of the Shakespearian characters appropriately costumed and sundry of them wearing masks. In this production Miss Pope was accustomed to appear as *Beatrice*, with Kelly—who was more a singer than an actor—as her *Benedick*. They entered and walked, or rather danced, across the stage, by way of representing the comedy of "Much



Ado about Nothing," and of paying homage to Shakespeare, and were rewarded with the cordial applause of the spectators. But one night, as Kelly writes, the comedian Moody "came to me and requested I would lend my domino and mask to a friend of his who wished to see the audience from the stage, and who would do exactly as I did, having frequently seen me and Miss Pope. On he went, but appeared instantly planet-struck and stood perfectly still; nor did he move until pushed off. The rage and disappointment of Miss Pope, who was an excellent dancer, and I not a very bad one, at not receiving the applause which she had always brought, was very great." It was with difficulty the wrath of the actress could be appeased. Kelly addressed her a humble letter of apology, and she was persuaded at length to write him a friendly answer, admonishing him to be careful how he yielded a second time to bad advice; "and to the day of her death," concludes Kelly, "she was kindly attentive to *me*, but she never forgave Moody, at whose instance I had transgressed."

Miss Pope's repertory of parts was most extensive. In her period the "standard comedies," known only by name to our modern playgoers, still retained possession of the stage, and the time had not yet come for Charles Lamb's lament that Congreve and Farquhar showed their heads once in seven years or so only to be exploded and put down instantly. Audiences were still

tolerant of the licence, the levity, the dissoluteness, which helped so largely to constitute Lamb's dearly loved "artificial comedy," if here and there might be discovered critics beginning to think that the wit and humour of the old plays were surely insufficient to keep them sweet much longer, and that after all it *did* matter a little "whether Sir Simon or Dapperwit stole away Miss Martha, or who was the father of Lord Froth's or Sir Paul Pliant's children." Miss Pope appeared from time to time as *Foible* in "The Way of the World ;" as *Edging* in "The Careless Husband ;" as *Lady Lurewell* in "The Constant Couple ;" as *Mrs. Clermont* in "The Tender Husband ;" as *Clarinda* in "The Suspicious Husband ;" as *Olivia* in "The Plain Dealer ;" as *Patch* in "The Busy Body ;" as *Phædra* in "Amphitryon ;" now as *Lady Dainty* and now as *Lady Froth* in "The Double Dealer ;" as *Lady Dove* in "The Brothers," and *Mrs. Racket* in "The Belle's Stratagem," etc., etc.

In 1779 Miss Pope was to be received with uproarious applause when she trod the stage the first representative of *Tilburina* in "The Critic." She caricatured the conventional heroine of high-flown tragedy, and, trailing her long skirts of white satin about the stage, duly went stark mad amid the heartiest laughter of the audience. Puff was amply justified in demanding, "Do you ever desire to see anybody madder than that?" She further served Sheridan by appearing in his other

plays ; now as *Lucy* in "The Rivals," now as *Mrs. Malaprop*, and now as the *Duenna* ; but she was not, of course, the original representative of those characters. Upon the first production of "The Clandestine Marriage," in 1766, she had appeared as *Miss Sterling*, and she remained for many years in possession of the part ; but in 1802, by express command of George III., who greatly delighted in her acting, Miss Pope for the first time personated *Mrs. Heidelberg*. The comedy had soon to be withdrawn, however ; for King, the original *Lord Ogleby*, was retiring from the stage, and a competent substitute for him could not be found. In 1796, in support of Charles Kemble's *George Barnwell*, Miss Pope accepted the inferior part of *Lucy*, with an understanding that the great Mrs. Siddons would also condescend upon the occasion and undertake the character of *Milwood*. In 1805 Miss Pope played *Mrs. Candour*, to find herself the last survivor of the original cast. All her old playfellows had departed ; the time for her own leave-taking drew near. In 1807 Leigh Hunt noted that her "powers of voice and of action" were weakening, although her sense of humour remained as strong as ever, and she was still able to entertain highly, because of the soundness of her histrionic method. The stage was as her own apartment, her bearing was so easy and natural, she indulged in no excess of action, she never seemed to address herself particularly to the

spectators, her manner was emphatic but without exaggeration, and she was especially commended for the skilful management of her voice. This was said to be peculiarly observable in her *Mrs. Candour*, "where her affected sentiments are so inimitably hidden by the natural tones of her voice that it is no wonder that her scandal carries perfect conviction to everybody around her." In 1806 she appeared for one night only as *Lady Minikin* in Garrick's farce of "Bon Ton," a part she had first undertaken in 1775. In the following year she was seen for the last time upon the stage. "The Heir-at-Law" was presented for her benefit; she played *Deborah Dowlas*, and she personated her old character of *Audrey* in delivering her farewell address.

Her friends lamented her decision to undertake so poor and unsuitable a part as *Deborah Dowlas* on the occasion of her last benefit. She had not before assumed the character; it was altogether new to her. Did ever actress before, it was asked, learn a new part for her last appearance on the stage? Moreover, she had to accomplish the arduous task of saying good-bye to a public she had known so long and served so faithfully. She consulted her friend James Smith as to the dress she should wear as *Deborah*. He advised black bombazeen. It had been usual to dress the character very showily indeed, with

a sort of vulgar splendour. But Smith declared that all the *dramatis personæ* should properly be clad in suits of sable. The *Dowlases* would all be in mourning as relatives of the deceased *Lord Duberly*. As his son, *Henry Moreland* would also wear black ; while *Steadfast*, a friend of the family, would assume complimentary mourning. Custom would require *Doctor Pangloss, LL.D.* and *A.S.S.*, to be attired in black. *Miss Caroline Dormer*, having lost her father, and *Cicely* and *Zekiel Homespun* being in like plight, would all three be in mourning ; while *Kendrick*, *Miss Dormer's* Irish servant, would probably don a black coat by way of showing sympathy with his mistress's distress. Miss Pope was not convinced, however, by this statement, and resolved to dress *Deborah* after the fashion adopted by her predecessors in the part. The farewell address, delivered in the character of *Audrey*, was written in verse. One line of it only—"And now poor Audrey bids you all farewell"—seems to have survived. Long afterwards James Smith found it dwelling in his memory.

Miss Pope lived many years—forty, it is said—on the south side of Great Queen Street, within two doors of the Freemasons' Tavern. On summer evenings, when the windows were open, the clattering of knives and forks and the jingling of glasses greatly disturbed the serenity of Miss Pope's back drawing-room—especially when, as James Smith suggested, the toast of "Pros-

perity to the Deaf and Dumb Charity" was duly honoured at the Freemasons'. Old-fashioned portraits adorned the walls. Here was seen the face of the beautiful Mrs. Oldfield, the actress; here was pictured a corpulent gentleman in a pearl-coloured suit, with a laced cocked hat under his arm: Holland, the actor, denounced by Churchill as a mere imitator of Garrick—"I hate e'en Garrick second-hand." When, in her old age—a sexagenarian, unwieldy of figure, and endowed with ample "duplicity of chin"—Miss Pope grew garrulous, she was prone to descant upon the one romance of her life, the explanation of her celibacy; she told the story of her early love and disappointment. "Mr. Holland and myself," she would say, "were mutually attached. I had reason to expect that he would make me an offer of his hand. Mr. Garrick warned me of his levities and his gallantries, but I had read that reformed rakes made the best husbands, and I hoped I should find it so. One day I went to visit Mrs. Clive in the Richmond coach, which stopped to bait at Mortlake, when whom should I see pass me rapidly in a post-chaise but Mr. Holland, in company with a lady! I felt a pang of jealousy which kept me silent the rest of the journey. I left the coach at the King's Head, near the present bridge, and with my little wicker-basket in my hand, I set off to walk along Twickenham meadows to Strawberry Hill. When I came opposite the Eel-pie

Island I saw the same parties in a boat together, and I then discovered that Mr. Holland's companion was the notorious Mrs. Baddeley. He looked confused when he saw me, and tried to row across to the Richmond side, but the weeds prevented him. I met him on the Tuesday morning following at a rehearsal. He had done wrong, and he knew it, but he assumed an air of *hauteur*. I was as proud as he, and from that time we never exchanged a word. He afterwards made love to this, that, and t'other woman, but I have reason to know that he never was really happy." Her tears fell as she told her story, though it dealt with events that were forty years old. Holland died of small-pox at the early age of thirty-six, so far back as 1769; a tablet to his memory, with an inscription by Garrick, being placed in the chancel of Chiswick church.

At Mrs. Clive's Twickenham cottage—"Little Strawberry Hill," or "Clive-den," as Horace Walpole was wont to style it—Miss Pope was a frequent visitor, usually passing a month with the retired actress during the summer vacation when Drury Lane was closed. She journeyed to Twickenham by the passage-boat rowed by Thames watermen. On one occasion, as she related, to while away the time after passing Vauxhall, she took a book from her pocket and began to read. The boatmen were disappointed; they knew her to be the popular comic actress, Miss Pope. "Oh, ma'am," said one of

them, "we hoped to have the pleasure of hearing you talk." There was no resisting this simple homage. "I took the hint," said the good-natured lady, "and put away my book." Of the superfine Horace Walpole Miss Pope frankly avowed her opinion: "He *could* be very pleasant, and he could be very unpleasant." In what way? she was asked. "Oh, very snarling and sarcastic." She often met him at Mrs. Clive's tea-table. She shared in the old-fashioned pleasures of Little Strawberry Hill—its little supper- and card-parties, when Mrs. Clive managed to carry off at quadrille such "miraculous draughts of fish," as Walpole said. Then there were the saunterings in the tiny garden, or across the meadow, or down the green lane, which had been cut for her use between the cottage and the common, and which it was humorously proposed to call Drury Lane. The actresses were both very portly of figure, while Mrs. Clive owned so rubicund a complexion that when her face rose at Strawberry Hill Lady Townshend declared it made the place quite sultry. When Hounslow Powder Mills blew up, Walpole, to give an idea of the terrible nature of the explosion, declared that it "almost shook Mrs. Clive." But the lively parties at Cliveden, composed of "people of quality," not less than of players, artists, authors, and even parsons, came to an end in 1785 upon the somewhat sudden death of Mrs. Clive. Walpole had been playing cards with her but three days



before, when he found her, as he writes, "extremely confused and not knowing what she did." He had seen "something of this sort before, and had found her much broken." She caught cold attending the funeral of General Lister, and was confined to her room for a day or two. "She rose to have her bed made, and while sitting on the bed with her maid by her, sank down at once without pang or groan." However, she was in her seventy-fifth year. She was buried in Twickenham churchyard, Miss Pope writing the epitaph engraved upon a mural tablet, and commencing, "Clive's blameless life this tablet shall proclaim."

Very soon after her retirement from the stage Miss Pope quitted Great Queen Street for Newman Street; it was no longer necessary for her to live so near the theatre. Mr. James Smith writes of an evening party she gave at her new residence within twelve months after her retreat from Drury Lane, when she entertained many distinguished guests, some even from "the purlieus of St. James's Palace," as her friend curiously narrates. "Here," he adds, "I beheld her in society for the last time. She shortly afterwards was attacked by a stupor of the brain; and this once lively and amiable woman, who had entertained me repeatedly with anecdotes of people of note in her earlier days, sat calmly and quietly in her armchair by the fireside, patting the head of her poodle dog, and smiling at what passed in

conversation, without being at all conscious of the meaning of what was uttered. At her death I promised to myself to write her character in one of the public journals, and at her funeral I vowed to myself to write her epitaph. But, as Dr. Johnson says, 'the promises of authors are like the vows of lovers.'" James Smith's narrative is incomplete, however. Miss Pope resided no long while in Newman Street. She removed thence first to No. 25, and afterwards to No. 17, St. Michael's Place, Brompton; dying there on the 30th July, 1818, as Mr. Crofton Croker has recorded in his "Walk from London to Fulham." She survived her retirement from the stage some ten years.

Miss Pope—our *Mrs. Candour* and *Tilburina*—formed a connecting link between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in their relation to theatrical history. Many of the most memorable of dramatic events occurred within the period of her prolonged career. Born within a year or two of Garrick's first appearance at Goodman's Fields, she became his devoted pupil and playfellow, a faithful member of his company during many years. Garrick gone, she rendered valuable service to Sheridan and the Kembles, witnessed their rising and setting, and lived to the time of the coming of Edmund Kean, and even of Macready. Her earliest efforts obtained record in the "Rosciad;" she was the last survivor of the players enumerated by Churchill;

her later performances were noted by Lamb, Hazlitt, and James Smith, and by their junior, Leigh Hunt, who saw his first play in 1800, and lived to 1859. James Smith, who survived until 1839, had seen Miss Pope play *Flippanta* in "The Confederacy," a part she first assumed in 1769. Leigh Hunt has left mention of her *Mrs. Candour*; her *Lady Courtland* in Miss Chambers's "elegant comedy," as it was the fashion to call it, "The School for Friends;" and her *Mrs. Malaprop*. James Smith held her *Widow Racket* in "The Belle's Stratagem" to be one of her best parts, and noted that "her usual manner of exhibiting piquant carelessness consisted in tossing her head from right to left and striking the palm of each hand with the back of its fellow, at the same moment casting her eyes upward with an air of nonchalance." Miss Mellon, it seems, adopted something of Miss Pope's manner in this respect. Leigh Hunt dwells particularly upon the artistic moderation and excessive naturalness of her acting. "She never," he writes, "passed those limits at which the actor's adherence to the author ends, and his mere wish to please the audience commences." He mentions "her precise bit of a voice and genuine humour, . . . her perfection of old-gentlewomanly staidness;" notes that "with features neither naturally good nor flexible, she managed a surprising variety of ex-

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pression ;" and concludes : "with perpetual applause to flatter her, and a long favouritism to secure her, she had no bad habits; and, when even the best of our actors are considered, it is astonishing how much praise is contained in that simple truth."

## CHAPTER XI.

## "SIR OLIVER SURFACE."

"BARTLEMY FAIR," to cite its popular title, was long a sort of London carnival celebrated in Smithfield annually at Bartholomew Tide. It was of old institution; originally and for centuries it had been the Great Cloth Fair of England; King Henry II. is said to have assigned the privilege of holding it to the head of the Priory of St. Bartholomew in Smithfield, while limiting its duration to three days: the eve, the day, and the morrow of the Festival of St. Bartholomew. But the clothiers and woollen drapers presently needed, sought, and found a wider market for the sale of their manufactures. From the time of Elizabeth, the fair, forfeiting its commercial character and dignity, degenerated into a place of revelry, raree-shows, and popular amusements, with booths for the exhibition of monstrosities and the sale of "fairings." The three days were extended to fourteen; to be reduced again to three, however, in 1708. The grave Evelyn had passed through the fair,

contemplating its "celebrated follies." The gayer diarist, Pepys, was a frequent visitor. At the fair in Smithfield he found "the best dancing on the rope that ever he had seen in his life;" he made purchases of sundry "combs for his wife to give her maids;" and he noted the presence of my Lady Castlemaine at the puppet-show of "Patient Grizill," with "the street full of people expecting her coming out."

To certain of the players Bartholomew Tide, with its London fair, was very welcome. The month of August had arrived; the doors of the patent theatres were closed; the actors who were not strolling the provinces had too much time upon their hands. It was usual for the more popular comedians—apparently the tragedians were less active in the matter—to open booths or temporary theatres in the neighbourhood of the fair. Estcourt and Pinkethman, the favourite comic actors of Queen Anne's time, found much profit from their enterprise as theatrical managers in Smithfield. Joe Miller, too, famous for that Jest-Book which, bearing his name, was in truth the work of another hand, and the player, Henry Norris, admiringly known as "Jubilee Dickey," from his performance of the character of *Dickey* in Farquhar's "Constant Couple; or, a Trip to the Jubilee," were joint proprietors of a booth open at the Hartshorn Inn, near Pie Corner. At these temporary theatres the entertainments were, without doubt, of a coarse sort

enough : the comedians of the time easily declined into buffoonery and horseplay, to suit the grosser taste of their patrons. At Miller's booth, "Over against the Cross Daggers," it may be noted that the entertainment somehow consisted of a "droll," entitled "The Tempest, or the Distressed Lovers; with the Comical Humours of the Enchanted Scotchman or Jockey, and the Three Witches," which must have been a complex travestie of two of Shakespeare's plays.

Still, the appearance of an actor as a Bartholomew Fair manager was a proof of his popularity; and when the comedian Richard Yates became the proprietor of a booth in Smithfield, with Ned Shuter as his rival or partner, it is not clear which, the fact fully testified to his fame as a player, or to his favour with, at any rate, the galleries of his time. He seemed to take rank as a worthy successor of Pinkethman, Hippisley, Bullock, Griffin, Miller, and the rest. But not less amusing than these as a comedian, it is probable that he was a superior artist, that his histrionic manner boasted something more of refinement and subtlety. The comic actors were long in foregoing the licence of the clowns of the Elizabethan stage, the disposition to "gag" and grimace, to descend without scruple to all kinds of droll excesses, whatever "necessary question of the play" there might be to be considered; and from vice of this kind Yates's acting was not altogether free. But assuredly he was less

reproachable than his predecessors. He succeeded not merely in farce, but also in sterling comedy. He shone in a variety of Shakespearian characters: as the clowns of "Measure for Measure," "The Winter's Tale," "Twelfth Night," and "All's Well that Ends Well;" as *Pistol*, *Sir Hugh Evans*, *Roderigo*, *Autolycus*, *Trinculo*, *Grumio*, *Shallow*, *Malvolio*, *Touchstone*, *Launce*, *Bottom*, *Lucio*, *Cloten*, *Dogberry*; and he even ventured to appear as *Shylock* and *Falstaff*. He was accepted, too, as an excellent representative of the worthy citizens, the honest merchants, and respectable elderly gentlemen of the stage. Among these has to be counted Sheridan's *Sir Oliver Surface*, of which character Richard Yates was the first personator. It was held to be one of the best of his assumptions.

Of his early life little is known. He was born early in the eighteenth century, and made his first appearance upon the London stage at the Haymarket in 1736. He sustained the two characters of *Lord Place* and *Law* in Fielding's dramatic satire of "Pasquin;" but it seems that on the eleventh night of performance he resigned the first of these parts to Mrs. Charlotte Charke, the very eccentric daughter of Colley Cibber. "As he had other parts in the piece," the lady writes in the narrative of her life, "Mr. Fielding begged the favour of him to spare that to make room for me, and I was accordingly engaged at four guineas per week." A season later, and



Yates was undertaking very subordinate characters at Covent Garden. Davies, in his *Miscellanies*, 1784, notes that Yates, then "by the general voice allowed to be the first comedian of the age," had, forty-five years before, in the tragedy of "Richard II.," appeared as the anonymous attendant who, at the king's bidding, brings a looking-glass upon the stage. He also figured as *Wart*, one of Falstaff's ragged recruits, and as the character known as the *Mad Welchman* in the play of "The Pilgrim." He was emboldened, however, at the end of the season, to take a benefit,—or rather, the fourth part of one; for Mrs. Elmy, the actress, and "two others," as the playbills stated, shared in the proceeds,—when he personated *Sir Joseph Wittol* in Congreve's "Old Bachelor," a character left open to him by the retirement of Joe Miller, in whose possession it had long remained.

In 1739 Yates transferred his services to Drury Lane, appearing as *Pantaloone* in a pantomime called "Harlequin Shipwrecked," as *Gripus* in "Amphitryon," *Quaint* in "Æsop," *Dapper* in "The Alchemist," and *Jeremy* in "Love for Love." In the following year he was a member of the Goodman's Fields company, his performances being assisted by the presence of his first wife, an actress of minor note. He sustained a great variety of characters, and for his benefit announced that he would attempt the character of *Lovegold* in "The Miser,"

"after the manner of the late Mr. Griffin," while he apologized for not waiting on the ladies and gentlemen of the neighbourhood to solicit their patronage, "as he was not acquainted with that part of the town." He supported Garrick's performances in comedy at the Goodman's Fields theatre, playing *Petulant* to his *Witwoud*, *Don Lewis* to his *Clodio*, *Major Rakish* to his *Master Johnny* in "The Schoolboy," etc.; and when Garrick quitted the East for the West End of London, and accepted an engagement to appear at Drury Lane Theatre, Yates accompanied him. With Garrick, indeed, Yates had been associated from the first; he was wont to relate that he had been a member of the Ipswich company when Garrick, with a blackened face and assuming the name of Lyddal, made his first essay upon the stage as *Aboan*, in the play of "Oroonoko." From 1742 until the close of the season of 1766-7, indeed, Yates continued to be a member of the Drury Lane company. In 1756 he became the husband of an actress who, as Mrs. Graham, had for two seasons played with marked success in tragedy. As Mrs. Yates she acquired a still larger measure of fame, taking high rank among the finest of English performers. She was, Davies notes, "an actress whose just elocution, noble manner, warm passion, and majestic deportment had excited the admiration of foreigners and fixed the affection and applause of her own countrymen." Romney had

pictured her as the muse of tragedy some time before it occurred to Reynolds to portray Mrs. Siddons in the same character. To comedy she was, no doubt, unequal ; her *Lady Townley* was described as "merely a fifth-act lady ;" she succeeded only in the serious scene at the close of the play. The "Dramatic Censor" of 1770 held that her fine person, regular but haughty features, and powerful voice carried her well through rage and disdain, but that she was "deficient in the tender feelings, and hurried the forcible ones to too great a degree of violence." *Desdemona* and *Monimia*, it was judged, were not suited to her ; her *Imogen* had great merit, but lacked "an essential innocence ;" her *Calista*, if deficient in the pathetic parts, yet happily conveyed the pride and violence of the character. She was great as *Lady Macbeth*, *Constance*, *Mandane* ; her *Medea* was unrivalled ; as *Jane Shore* she was only equalled by Mrs. Siddons ; her *Margaret of Anjou* displayed extraordinary power.

With both Mr. and Mrs. Yates Churchill dealt very severely in his "Rosciad," 1761. Of the lady he wrote :—

"Might figure give a title unto fame,  
What rival should with Yates dispute her claim ?  
But justice may not partial trophies raise,  
Nor sink the actress in the woman's praise.  
Still hand in hand her words and actions go,  
And the heart feels more than the features show :

For, through the regions of that beauteous face,  
We no variety of passion trace ;  
Dead to the soft emotions of the heart,  
No kindred softness can those eyes impart ;  
The brow, still fixed in Sorrow's sullen frame,  
Void of distinction, marks all parts the same."

Yates is described in even harsher terms ; but, no doubt, the defects of his histrionic manner are accurately noted :—

"Lo, Yates ! Without the least finesse of art,  
He gets applause—I wish he'd get his part.  
When hot Impatience is in full career,  
How vilely ' Hark'e ! Hark'e ! ' grates the ear.  
When active Fancy from the brain is sent  
And stands on tip-toe for some wished event,  
I hate those careless blunders which recall  
Suspended sense, and prove it fiction all.  
In characters of low and vulgar mould,  
When nature's coarsest features we behold,  
When, destitute of ev'ry decent grace,  
Unmannered jests are blurted in your face,  
Then Yates with justice strict attention draws,  
Acts truly from himself and gains applause.  
But when to please himself or charm his wife,  
He aims at something in politer life ;  
When, blindly thwarting nature's stubborn plan,  
He treads the stage by way of gentleman,  
The clown who no one touch of breeding knows  
Looks like Tom Errand dressed in Clincher's clothes.  
Fond of his dress, fond of his person grown,  
Laughed at by all, and to himself unknown,  
From side to side he struts, he smiles, he prates,  
And seems to wonder what's become of Yates !"

This was humorous enough, especially to the lookers-on.  
Yates judged it to be malignant beyond measure.

The "Rosciad" fell like an explosive shell among the players. As one of them confessed, "they ran about the town like so many stricken deer." Their consternation was only surpassed by their wrath. It was a sort of comfort to them to find that so many of them had been attacked, that they suffered gregariously, that so few had been spared. Even Garrick, it was said, was too full of terror at the avalanche that had fallen in his neighbourhood, to rejoice very greatly at his own escape. Revenge was much talked of: there was a proposition to inflict personal chastisement upon the satirist. But Churchill's physical proportions had a deterring effect even upon the most violently inclined. It was told of Yates that, seated in the parlour of the "Rose Tavern," he snatched up a case-knife in a very menacing manner when he perceived the figure of his censor darkening the entrance; but the formidable aspect of the stalwart, brawny, "clumsy Curate of Clapham," as Foote called him, had its due effect; the actor quietly laid down his weapon and abandoned all thought of avenging himself by means of assault and battery, cutting or wounding. He was careful, however, to demonstrate upon the stage his contempt for his critic by repeating in a marked manner the words "Hark'e! Hark'e!" to which Churchill had called attention. This was his manner of showing how much or how little he felt the attack upon him. Davies has stated that Churchill had

detected almost the only fault with which Yates was chargeable : an occasional defect of memory ; " to hide this, he would sometimes repeat a sentence two or three times over." It may be gathered, however, from Hugh Kelly's "Thespis," published five years later than the "Rosciad," that Yates's hesitancy of speech was for the most part simply due to nervousness and excess of anxiety :—

"When a new part unhappily he plays,  
A thousand doubts perplex him and amaze ;  
Fast from himself he tremblingly retires,  
Nor trusts that worth which all the world admires ;  
But on a sea of causeless terror tost,  
Allows both mind and memory to be lost."

And the general merits of the actor are strongly insisted upon in the lines :—

"Yates with high rank for ever must be placed,  
Who blends such strict propriety with taste ;  
From nature's fount so regularly draws,  
And never seeks to trick us of applause.  
Mark, when he plays, no vacancy of face,  
No wandering eye or ignorant grimace,  
Is rudely suffered once to intervene,  
Or check the growing business of a scene ;  
Nay, in his silence, happily employed,  
He looks continual meaning on the void ;  
Bids every glance with character be fraught,  
And swells each muscle with a burst of thought."

And this good opinion, however tumidly expressed, is confirmed by the notice of the actor in a later poem, "The Theatres," 1772 :—

“ We ne’er have seen, and haply never may,  
A more correct or chaste performer play  
Than Yates ; who, in his proper style,  
A cynic of some laughter must beguile ;  
Without one gleam of paltry, trickful art,  
By nature led, he glides upon the heart ;  
Traces the path where judgment strikes a line,  
And justly scorns by low finesse to shine,” etc.

Other critics, writing in prose, applauded Yates for his “humour, propriety, and close adherence to nature,” for his efforts in low comedy, and for his portraits of old men. He was pronounced “a very just comedian, seldom beholden to trick for applause ;” “a useful and pleasing performer, with a particular turn for low humour ;” the only actor then on the stage possessed of “a just notion of Shakespeare’s fools,” and “dressing his parts with singular propriety.”

At the close of the season of 1766–7, Mr. and Mrs. Yates quitted Drury Lane and accepted an engagement at Covent Garden Theatre. Messrs. Harris, Rutherford, Colman, and Powell had become the purchasers of its patent, and were resolved upon a vigorous campaign. Both actor and actress had become a little weary of Garrick’s management, and the temptation of an increased salary was not to be resisted. Garrick supplied Mrs. Yates’s place by engaging Mrs. Dancer, who afterwards became known as Mrs. Spranger Barry and as Mrs. Crawford. Mr. and Mrs. Yates remained at Covent Garden until the end of the season of 1771–2. During

the two following seasons they appear to have been absent from London. In 1775 Garrick sought again the assistance of his old playfellows, and wrote to Mrs. Yates: "In all dealings, the plain and simple truth is the best policy. As Mrs. Barry is in treaty with another theatre, it is natural for me to wish a treaty with another lady, and it is as natural that my inclinations look towards you. If you have no objections to enter into a treaty with me, be pleased to name your time and place, and I shall be as punctual as I ought to be to so fine a woman and so good an actress." The lady replied: "On considering every circumstance of my situation and my novelty, to say nothing of my beauty, I think I cannot in conscience take less than £700 a year for my salary; for my clothes, as I love to be well dressed, and the characters I appear in require it, I expect £200." She was disinclined to take a benefit, although Dickey, as she called her husband, "considered only the main chance, and was of a different opinion." She added: "But I am clear, the worst advice a woman can possibly follow is that of her husband, and I had much rather you should determine that point for me than he." She was engaged for two years at a salary of £800 a year, and a benefit upon the usual terms; it being agreed that she should provide all her own clothes at her own expense for all characters in tragedy and comedy. Yates was offered an engagement upon a salary of £12



per week and a benefit. It now began to be said that Yates secured engagements rather in right of his wife's merits and attractions than because of his own.

It was Garrick's fate to be frequently upon rather angry terms with his company; and no doubt he was called upon to endure very capricious and inconsiderate and even dishonest treatment. In October, 1775, he addressed a letter of strong expostulation to Mr. Yates concerning his wife's conduct. "Do you and Mrs. Yates imagine," he asked, "that the proprietors will submit to this manner of going on, or that they will pay such a large sum of money for having their business so destroyed as it was the greater part of the last season, and has been wholly this, by waiting for Mrs. Yates's pleasure to perform? She played but thirty times last season, and as she goes on in the proportion of four times in six weeks, she will play twenty times in this season. Indeed, Mr. Yates, this will not do, and I give you fair notice. We lost greatly by her not playing the first night she was advertised, and to this day no reason could be given for the disappointment, nor did you offer any to my brother, but that you could not help it and you did all in your power to oblige her to act. . . . I shall not submit to this very unaccountable and unreasonable behaviour." She had asked for comedy parts, to save her the fatigue of always appearing in tragedy. Mr. Yates, on her behalf, had mentioned *Araminta* in "The

School for Lovers," and *Hippolita* in "She Would and She Would Not." But when these parts were offered her she declined them, because she would not be so indelicate as to take them from the lady who was in the habit of playing them. Yet she demanded the part of *Belinda* in "All in the Wrong," although she knew it had been long in the possession of a capital actress; while she refused to resume her original character of *Widow Sprightly* in "The Discovery," which had been specially revived for the entertainment of Queen Charlotte. Garrick concluded: "To finish this business at once, and that we may be more explicit, it is my greatest pleasure to live in the greatest harmony with my capital performers, and more particularly so with Mr. and Mrs. Yates. But if they persist to distress us, and Mrs. Yates is resolved to withdraw herself so often, and sometimes without a cause, I shall be obliged to do what I would most wish to avoid." This vague threat may have effected some good. There was further difficulty, however, a little later, when the actress refused to reappear as *Almeria*, the heroine of Congreve's "Mourning Bride," because the part was now "unfit" for her, and because, with Garrick's consent, she had abandoned it fourteen years before. But Garrick was most urgent that she should reappear as *Almeria*. She had, it seems, voluntarily undertaken the part not long before, on the occasion of the benefit of Mr. Cautherley. Garrick wrote: "At

the time of the benefits last year, hearing how much the plays suffered by the performers taking parts 'for one night only,' I put up an order in the green-room that the manager would expect every performer to do for the house what they should do for the benefits, and for this good reason: why is not the public at large to be as well entertained as the friends of any single actor? and why are not the proprietors to be profited by the performance of Mrs. Yates as *Almeria*, as well as Mr. Cautherley?" In conclusion, he entreated her compliance, while reminding her that in such a case no forfeit could be accepted. She consented, but not very gracefully. "It is hard," she wrote, "to be governed by laws of which one is ignorant. This is the first time I ever heard of your order in respect to benefits, which will make me a little more cautious for the future. With regard to *Almeria*, I think it is a part unworthy of a capital actress; the table of forfeits is clearly in my favour, nor can I accept of the character as *mine*. But if my playing it a few nights will oblige you, I am ready to do it. I cannot help concluding with a few lines from your favourite author—

'Oh, 'tis excellent

To have a giant's strength,' etc., etc."

It may be noted that it fell to Mrs. Yates, as the leading actress of the theatre, to deliver in 1779, from the stage of Drury Lane, Sheridan's monody upon the death of Garrick.

*Sir Oliver Surface* was, with one exception, the last new character undertaken by Yates. During the seasons of 1780-1 and 1781-2 he did not perform in London. In December, 1782, he reappeared at Covent Garden, after an absence from that stage of ten years' duration. In 1783, on the production of Cumberland's prose tragedy of "The Mysterious Husband," he appeared as the first representative of Sir Edmund Travers—it was the last new part he was required to sustain. He acted, as John Taylor states in his "Records of My Life," "in so unaffected a manner, and with such an exact conformity to life, that it was the most perfect delusion I ever beheld on the stage in characters of the familiar drama." Taylor also applauds Yates's excellence as *Major Oakley* in "The Jealous Wife," a character he was also the first to sustain; and adds, "but the character he was chiefly celebrated for was Shakespeare's *Launce*." It is admitted that he was "not qualified to perform polished characters," while it was claimed for him that he personated "those in middle life with correctness, force, and impressive effect." He is described as "one of those actors who think for themselves, and disregard all traditionary gestures and manners." When he had a new character to play, he endeavoured to find some person whose deportment and disposition resembled it, or he searched his memory for some former model. "He was not so sportive as Parsons, but he was more correct and characteristic."

O'Keeffe writes of Yates, in 1763: "I liked him best in *Bottom the Weaver* and *Launce*; . . . his manner was of the dry or grave humour, but perfectly natural; his speech slow; he knew he had his audience, and therefore took them at his leisure. I wished to have had him in some of my early pieces; but he was at that time rich and old, and under no necessity to plague himself with studying new parts."

Yates preserved an air of mystery in regard to his age, and as a consequence, perhaps, acquired the reputation of being much older than he really was. At his death, in 1796, he was generally said to be ninety; but this was no doubt an exaggeration. In October, 1783, the *Public Advertiser* gave insertion to the following gossiping paragraph: "Dick Yates and his wife have retired from the stage, with a fortune perhaps much larger than any of their predecessors, except Garrick. At the least it may be computed at £36,000 or £40,000. Yates and his wife are also remarkable for the comely appearance with which they bear their age; for the age of these old acquaintances of the public is much greater than is usually thought. From theatrical dates, the one must be seventy, the other sixty years old." Yates wrote an indignant letter of denial, in his own name and on behalf of his wife. They had not retired with £40,000. They had not retired at all. Theatrical dates did not prove them to be the one seventy, the other sixty. As to his

own age, he declined to be explicit; but he protested that Mrs. Yates would not be "more than sixty" for a dozen years or more. She had made her first appearance on the stage in 1754, at Drury Lane, in Crisp's tragedy of "Virginia;" and she was then, he proclaimed, "as pretty a plump rosy Hebe as one shall see in a summer's day." She had the honour—an honour never conferred on any other person—of being introduced as a young beginner by a prologue written and spoken by no less a person than Mr. Garrick. Finally, Yates promised that any further such malevolent attacks, should he succeed in discovering their author, he would soundly punish with the help of "a good English oaken towel."

But after the year 1783, the London stage knew little or nothing more of either Mr. or Mrs. Yates. They took no formal leave of their profession, but seemed gradually to fade out of it. In 1786 "The Beaux' Stratagem" was announced at Covent Garden, for the benefit of Matthew Clark, a respectable comedian of the second class. It was a night of misadventures. Clarke was in a dying state, and, indeed, hardly survived the performance. Yates offered to appear in his stead, and play the part of *Scrub*. But Yates was suddenly attacked with a violent fit of the gout; it became impossible for him to present himself upon the stage. *Scrub* was therefore represented by Quick. Mrs. Yates played for the last time in May, 1785, at Drury Lane, when she appeared

"for that night only," as the *Duchess* in the tragedy of "Braganza," for the benefit of Mrs. Bellamy, the actress. Seventeen years before there had been a serious difference—even a fierce paper war—between the two ladies. Mrs. Yates, "in consequence of being obliged to perform two arduous characters the preceding and succeeding nights," had refused to personate *Hermione* in "The Distressed Mother," on the occasion of Mrs. Bellamy's benefit, and great had been Mrs. Bellamy's anger and indignation. Time had brought about concord and charity, however. The unfortunate Mrs. Bellamy, the wreck of her former self, was now incapable of delivering even the poetic address that had been prepared for her. She could only add some few farewell words in prose to the verses Miss Farren recited on her behalf. Earlier in the year Mrs. Yates had fulfilled engagements at Edinburgh and with Tate Wilkinson at York. Wilkinson writes fervently of her inimitable performance of the character of *Margaret of Anjou*, in Dr. Franklin's tragedy "The Earl of Warwick." "She played as well that night as any time I had ever seen her; the audience were all gratified in the highest degree." Yates accompanied his wife, but did not appear upon the stage. He distinguished himself by a judgment which the public speedily reversed: he pronounced Mrs. Jordan, then a member of Wilkinson's company, to be but "a piece of theatrical mediocrity."

It had been proposed at one time that Mrs. Yates

should join Henderson, the tragedian, in giving public readings from Shakespeare, and from other dramatists and poets. The actress could greatly have assisted the actor, it was thought. His readings at the Freemasons' Tavern had been received with extraordinary favour. It was said of him that he had read Cowper's "John Gilpin" into reputation. "The alterations of form, countenance, and sex," writes Boaden, "would have had great value in the exhibition." But Henderson died in November, 1785, and lies buried in Westminster Abbey. Mrs. Yates, who had for some time suffered severely from dropsy, died at her house in Stafford Row, Pimlico, in May, 1787. Her remains were interred in Richmond churchyard, where her father had been buried some years before.

Old as he was, the widower did not consider himself too old to marry again. Of Yates's third wife, however, little is known. She appeared upon the stage, but this seems to have been after the death of her husband. As his widow, she took a benefit at the Haymarket Theatre, where she sustained the character of *Margaret of Anjou*, one of the most famous impersonations of the second Mrs. Yates. She is said also to have appeared in "The Grecian Daughter" at the Haymarket, and to have performed the part of *Mandane* in "Cyrus," for the benefit of Mr. Hull, at Covent Garden. She subsequently accepted engagements at Dublin, where she remained

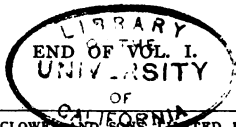


three seasons, and at Liverpool. In 1800, at Drury Lane, Mrs. Yates "from Dublin" represented *Angela* in "The Castle Spectre." She married a second time, and two years later, as Mrs. Ansell, she appeared at Drury Lane, sustaining the character of the *Queen* in "Hamlet," on the benefit night of Mrs. Powell, who, "for that night only," personated *Hamlet*, with Mrs. Jordan for her *Ophelia*. A critic of the time described Mrs. Ansell's acting as "spirited, but generally too elaborate." There seems nothing more to be said of the third Mrs. Yates.

Richard Yates died on the 21st April, 1796, and was buried beside his second wife, at Richmond. It was told of him that the day before his death he complained of the ill-usage he had experienced at the hands of the Drury Lane managers: they had refused him an order. "That was unkind, indeed, to so old a servant," it was remarked. "Yes," continued the dying man, "particularly when my admission could have kept no *living* soul out of the house. For I only requested to be buried under the centre of the stage; and they were hard-hearted enough to refuse me!" The Drury Lane built by Holland in 1794, to be totally destroyed by fire in 1809, was not the Drury Lane of Richard Yates's triumphs, however. Peter Cunningham has related that Yates died of "rage and disappointment," in Stafford Row, Pimlico: he had ordered eels for his dinner, but his

housekeeper had been unable to obtain them! It is narrated, too, that the actor's great-nephew, a lieutenant in the navy, was a few months later killed by a pistol-shot as he endeavoured to effect an entrance into the house from the back garden. He claimed to be entitled to the premises, but one Miss Jones, a rival claimant, with the aid of her friends had obtained possession, and resisted with fatal violence all his endeavours to force an entrance. A trial for murder followed, but the accused were acquitted.

Various other characters of note, in addition to *Sir Oliver Surface*, *Major Oakley*, and *Sir Edmund Travers*, first obtained histrionic life at the hands of Richard Yates. He was the original representative of *Vamp* in Foote's "Author," of old *Honeycombe* in Colman's Farce, of *Sir John Restless* in Murphy's "All in the Wrong," of *Sir Bashful Constant* in his "Way to Keep Him," of *Wingate* in his "Apprentice," and of *Quidnunc* in his "Upholsterer;" of *Philip* in the farce of "High Life Below Stairs," of *Sir Benjamin Dove* in Cumberland's "Brothers," of *Stirling* in "The Clandestine Marriage." The list of Yates's characters given by Genest numbers about one hundred and seventy-five.



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